SEX IN CINEMA: MORE STARS GONE NAKED

PLAYBOY

ENTERTAINMENT FO

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GALA CHRISTMAS ISSUE

HOLLYWOOD'S NEW SEX STAR KIM KARDASHIAN TAKES IT ALL OFF

THE RETURN OF STEPHEN KING
THRILLING NEW FICTION

NORMAN MAILER
ON GOD, THE DEVIL AND PLEASURE

PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFUL
BILL RICHARDSON
A BOLD PLAYBOY INTERVIEW

JIMMY KIMMEL AND SARAH SILVERMAN
A LOVE STORY
BY BILL ZEHME

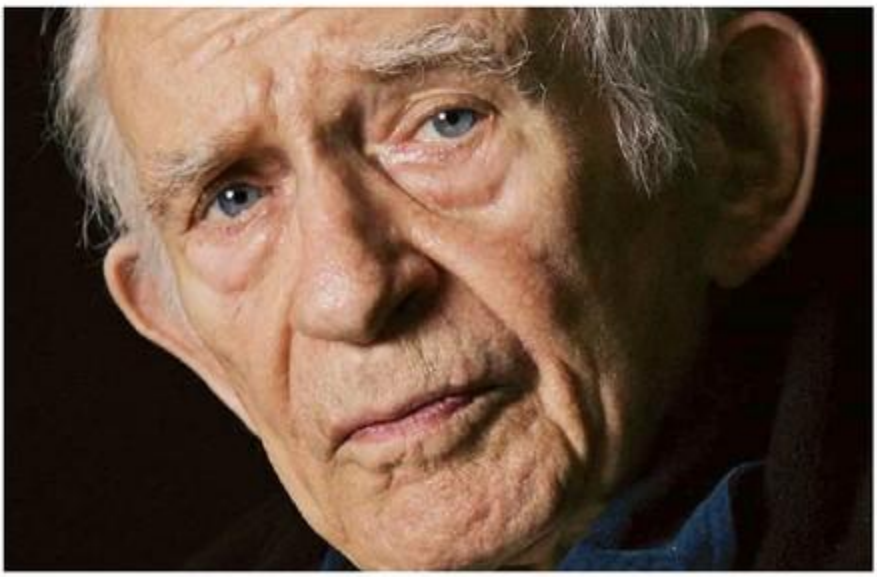
PLUS:
20Q: JOAQUIN PHOENIX
JIM HARRISON
SHERMAN ALEXIE
ROBERT OLEN BUTLER
CLASSIC XMAS CARTOONS
PAULA FOX
MAUREEN GIBBON
COLLEGE BASKETBALL
PARTY TUXES

With more than 200 stories to his credit and the novel *Duma Key* coming next month, **Stephen King** continues to enthrall us with his dark, disturbing imagination. In his latest short story, *Mute,* a traveling salesman whose terrain is King's fictitious Maine picks up a hitchhiker and pours out his heart about his wife's infidelity. Then it gets eerie. "I don't think there is a monster in every man, but I think there's one in most men," King has said. "I think most men are wired to perform acts of violence, usually defensive, but we're still primitive creatures, and we have a tendency toward violence." One can't help but wonder if a man who easily gives others nightmares sleeps well at night. "People ask me, 'Do you have bad dreams?' " he says. "And the answer is yes. When I don't write, I get bad dreams."

Celebrated fiction writer and poet **Jim Harrison** is among the authors who offer essays about their longing for leading lights in *Truly, Madly, Deeply (Mostly Madly).* Harrison wrote a letter to his inamorata Lauren Hutton, and she went out with him. "As a young writer, I discovered that the pen and poems worked," he says. "However, they didn't work as well as the guitars some of my swinish friends carried but couldn't play."

In *Intercourse,* Pulitzer Prize winner **Robert Olen Butler** plunges into the private thoughts of famous lovers (expect a collection to be published next year). Butler's personal life became public this summer when his wife left him to enter Ted Turner's orbit. "I started writing these within 36 hours of discovering," Butler says. "I knew she would leave me for Ted. I wasn't stupid. The inner landscape of some of these couples reflects the issues I dealt with."

Celebutante **Kim Kardashian** snared tabloid headlines when a sex tape of her with then boyfriend Ray J popped up without her permission. Now she bares it all on her own terms, in photos taken by super music-video director **Hype Williams** and Senior Contributing Photographer **Stephen Wayda.** "The shoot is the tape's opposite," Kardashian says. "I have a classic pinup body, and the photos are glamorous, classy. This is who I really am."



"The best of us spend our lives exploring what might be human reality," says **Norman Mailer.** "In consequence the conviction grew that I had a right to believe in the God I could visualize: an imperfect, existential God doing the best He—or She—could manage against all odds of an existence that not even He, our Creator, entirely controlled." America's most distinguished writer expounds on God and the devil with **Michael Lennon** in *On the Authority of the Senses,* taken from the new book *On God: An Uncommon Conversation* (Random House), their three-year dialogue on spirituality. "I was always fascinated by Mailer's views on God, and I proposed that we engage in a discussion," Lennon says. "His only proviso was that my questions remain with me until we met, ensuring his answers would be spontaneous. He has an extraordinary mind."

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COVER STORY

"I love the fantasy of the old-school pinup," says cover model Kim Kardashian. "It's so glamorous and sexy." We couldn't agree more, which is why unwrapping Paris Hilton's BFF and the star of the reality show *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* is a gift that keeps on giving. Senior Contributing Photographer Stephen Wayda decks the halls with our lady in red, while our Rabbit is absolutely riveted.

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BY JOSEPH DE ACETIS

this month on playboy.com

MAGAZINE BLOG
News, views and inside perspectives from PLAYBOY editors. playboy.com/blog

FAB FROSH
We name the NCAA's best freshmen hoopsters. playboy.com/magazine

JFK: STILL DOUBTS
Did a CIA agent lie to Congress about knowing Oswald? Jefferson Morley probes. playboy.com/jfk

PLAYBOY U
Matriculate Mansion-style at our college-only social network. playboy.com/pbu

THE A-LIST
You'll find snow bunnies galore at the 10 best ski resorts. playboy.com/alist

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PRINTED IN U.S.A.

THE WORLD OF PLAYBOY

HEF SIGHTINGS, MANSION FROLICS AND NIGHTLIFE NOTES

SHOW ME THE BUNNY

It girl Anna Faris stars in the upcoming *I Know What Boys Like*, shot on location at the Mansion. In the comedy, she plays a Bunny who is kicked out of Hef's place. But why, Hef? Why?

THE GIRLS CHECK INTO THE HOSPITAL

Kendra, Bridget and Holly spiced up the daytime drama *General Hospital* when they appeared in a fantasy sequence. The lucky Hef in training is Bradford Anderson, who plays Damian Spinelli on the ever popular series.

SUMMER SPLASHDOWN

Tom Leykis took the show on the road for the latest installment of his Summer Splash event live from the Mansion. The broadcast featured an interview with Hef (above) and a blistering performance by red-hot SoCal band Yellowcard (below).

MAKING A SPLASH

PLAYBOY cover girl and Olympic gold-medal swimmer Amanda Beard visited the soldiers stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington to greet troops and sign issues on a morale-boosting mission. Think she's fast in the water? You should see her with a pen.

HOT AUGUST NIGHTS AT THE MANSION

Playmate Brande Roderick, NFL star Willie Gault and actress Traci Bingham (above left), plus rocker Nikki Sixx (above right, with guest), were among the VIPs who flocked to the Mansion for the Hot August Nights charity fundraiser, hosted by Brande. Proceeds went to the Susan G. Komen foundation.

DREAM A LITTLE DREAM

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When the days grow long and the air turns sultry, Hollywood partygoers think of Hef's Midsummer Night's Dream. This year's theme, Arabian Nights, drew a heady mix of celebrities and Centerfolds to rock the casbah. (1) The Host and his harem, Holly, Bridget and Kendra. (2) Actor Stephen Dorff with a reveler. (3) Hef and Motown sultan Berry Gordy smile for the camera. (4) Comedian Gilbert Gottfried and Miss February 2007 Heather Rene Smith. (5) Corey Feldman and his wife, Susie, from *The Two Coreys*. (6) Crispin Glover from *Beowulf* with a partygoer. (7) Prankster Jamie Kennedy and actress Christa Campbell. (8) Adam Brody from *The O.C.* with Centerfold Lauren Michelle Hill. (9) Milo Ventimiglia from *Heroes* comes to the rescue. (10) *America's Got Talent* judge Piers Morgan with the Host. (11) Rocker Dave Navarro parties with Centerfolds Sara Jean Underwood and Amber Campisi. (12) Rapper and producer Too Short, at far right, with his protégés, the Pack. (13) Actor Christopher Knight and PLAYBOY cover girl Adrianne Curry indulge. (14) The Hilton sisters just can't refuse Mr. Playboy.

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PENN SPEAKS (NO SURPRISE)

I read *Teller Speaks* (September) with great interest. The writer is fascinated by Teller's genius at not talking onstage in our show. I'm mentioned, in passing, as the one who talks. I'm the one in whom the "secret power of silence" isn't. Okay, that's fine. Teller is my business partner. He says in the article that we're not really friends. Well, then, let me speak freely. PLAYBOY sells Teller short: There's so much more he

While Penn talks, Teller listens (usually).

can't do besides talk. He can't play cello. He can't juggle worth shit. He can't ride a unicycle. (By the way, I knew how to ride before clown college, thank you very much, fact-checkers.) He can't do rope or whip tricks. He can't throw knives or tomahawks. He can't snap his fingers in time with a simple swing groove. He can't do any acrobatics to speak of. He can't do any ventriloquism—and isn't that twice as powerful as just not talking? He can't dance. If you think he can't talk, you should hear him not sing. There's even magic stuff he can't do: He can't do a faro shuffle, and I've seen him screw up a simple French drop. Tigers, oh, tigers—he can't train tigers. He's even worse at handling tigers than that guy who got his head bitten off. He's never saved a kid with his first-aid knowledge. He has no surgery skills. I don't think he can change a tire. He way can't cook. He's not much of a driver. I'm not sure he can buy his own underwear or check into a hotel. He sure can't keep his dressing room hygienic or even neat. I've seen him, with my own eyes, not be able to order a doughnut at Krispy Kreme. He didn't even write the article that looks as if it's written by Teller in the first person. PLAYBOY could make singing the praises of what Teller doesn't do well a monthly feature. Oh, oh, oh, and he sure wouldn't be any good as a Centerfold. Man, if you want things he can't do, he couldn't pose nude and please anyone. You should see him not play badminton. He doesn't know what end of a shuttlecock to blow into. He's a genius just brimming with "secret power."

Penn Jillette
Las Vegas, Nevada

PS. One correction: You seem to use the word *mime* without knowing it's pejorative.

After being chosen from the audience to assist Penn & Teller with their famous needle trick, I was surprised to hear Teller whispering stage directions. I thought, He's not supposed to talk! What impressed me more was how these two down-to-earth guys mingled with fans after the performance. If you're in Las Vegas, a Penn & Teller show is a fantastic experience.

Richard Yenser
Trenton, Ohio

Upon seeing "Teller Speaks!" on the cover, I eagerly anticipated a scholarly discussion with the renowned nuclear physicist Edward Teller. What did I find? Soporific drivel by some "magician" I've never heard of. Bummer!

Wally Barkalow
Concord, California

Edward Teller died in 2003, so that would have been quite an interview.

KEEPING IT REAL

Last year you gave us all-natural fräulein Janine Habeck (*Achtung, Baby,* September 2006). This year you upped the ante with Patrice Hollis (*Natural Beauty,* September). I can hardly wait for 2008.

John Pathy
Toronto, Ontario

Patrice is gorgeous. Please give us more Playmates of color. Susie Da Silva ("Employee of the Month," *After Hours,* September) is a great place to start.

Sandra Huber
Portland, Oregon

Short men are a turnoff for Patrice Hollis on a par with bad breath? Fortunately, my girlfriend isn't so shallow.

Mike Johnson
West Hollywood, California

Patrice is the most gorgeous Playmate in at least five years. After watching her Video Data Sheet online, I see why: She's part Asian and part African American, two races that include some of the hottest women on the planet.

Kevin Smith
Bullhead City, Arizona

THE TEAMS WE LEFT BEHIND

I always look forward to your *Pigskin Preview* (September), but this year I am dismayed by Gary Cole's picks. How could he leave the University of California, Berkeley out of the top 25? When Cal gets its bid for a BCS bowl, I expect tickets to a Mansion party.

Joe Monroe
Sacramento, California

And when it doesn't, we get...what?

No Georgia? The team that finished the 2006 season by beating Auburn, Georgia Tech and Virginia Tech? Cole must have been distracted by the ladies at the Mansion. I would be too.

Paul Turner
Adel, Georgia

MYSTERY GIRL

Your September cover model is possibly the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, aside from my dear wife. Can you please tell us her name?

Raymond Rosen
Chatsworth, California

That's Amanda Paige, Miss October 2005. See cyber.playboy.com for more. Also below.

The wet version of our September cover.

Wow! I could barely turn the Paige.

Ron Messa
Slidell, Louisiana

READ JOKE, WIN PRIZE

Earlier today my mother called me at work. She was on hold with a local radio DJ and said she needed a "short, clean joke" fast. I grabbed an issue of PLAYBOY, flipped it open to *Party Jokes* and read

WHAT IS THIS FINE LINE?

You've heard the saying:
There's a fine line between
good and evil.

Well, HORNITOS™ is the
fine line where pleasurable taste
and bold tequila collide.

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and you'll soon find balance in
a most unexpected place.

Just the kind
of enlightenment you've been
searching for.

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her a great one: "'I am going to make you the happiest woman in the world,' a man said to his wife one night. 'Oh,' she replied, 'I'll miss you.'" I'm proud to say that joke won my mother two tickets to see Toby Keith in concert.

Daniel Fillmore
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Nice job. What time is she picking us up?

SCARED STRAIGHT

I was always told never to touch coral, but how could any man resist when it's wrapped around scream queen Christa Campbell (*Reel Deal*, September)?

Greg Mifsud
Fairview, Pennsylvania

NUMBER CRUNCHING

As a longtime high-performance-car enthusiast and mechanical engineer, I can describe *American Muscle* (September) only as entertaining. The horsepower figures you quote for the older cars are myths: The evidence is incontrovertible to those of us who understand the principles of engine design and have actual racing experience, as well as access to vintage road tests, dynamometer tests, National Hot Rod Association records, etc. Unfortunately, current sources tend to focus solely on the most impressive statistics for the older muscle cars, usually failing to mention the significant modifications required to achieve them. I realize PLAYBOY isn't *Hot Rod*, but you have a responsibility to print the truth.

Robert Angeli
Portsmouth, Rhode Island

We gave optimal numbers because no one cares what muscle cars can do in real-world conditions. They are designed for dreamers.

DO-IT-YOURSELF PORN

Kudos to John H. Richardson for *The RedClouds Revolution* (September), which dispels the sordid stereotype that people who share explicit photos of themselves must be perverts or freaks. We have always loved to play the role of Peeping Tom as he ogles Lady Godiva, and technology has made it that much easier. The men, women and couples who create "reality porn" for sites such as RedClouds seem to be looking for something other than 15 minutes of Warholian fame. That many contributors choose to blur or hide their faces is a sad commentary on our society's continuing squeamishness about human sexuality.

Clay Calvert
State College, Pennsylvania

Calvert is a professor at Penn State and author of Voyeur Nation: Media, Privacy and Peering in Modern Culture.

You make it sound as if Igor Shoemaker is a free-love patriot running a not-for-profit porn site. What a hoot. RedClouds is only $25 a year, but Shoemaker quickly moves the postings into the archives, which cost another $30 to $50 to access. He places video clips in a third site that costs $25 a year. Besides his server costs, Shoemaker's expenses are practically zero. He doesn't have to pay any of the women who submit material to RedClouds because they are being "liberated." He liberated me as well, but I got smart.

Annette (formerly Nette)
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

You claim RedClouds represents "the next phase of the sexual revolution," but revolution requires people to take risks, and posting anonymous photos and comments is not risky. RedClouds may encourage people to explore, but it also encourages them to be passive. It is just another cog in the "divide-and-conquer" machine. If you let steam out of a pressure cooker at regular intervals, it will never explode. But sometimes explosions are necessary, especially in these oppressive times.

Name withheld
Madison, Wisconsin

A photo posted recently at RedClouds.

I had my doubts when I heard a journalist was snooping around the RedClouds boards. Was this yet another attempt to ridicule nonconformists in a society governed by churchgoers? I also feared an article in a popular men's magazine might attract a zillion perverted idiots. But after reading Richardson's piece, I admit to being impressed. He treats the site and its members with care. Sadly, many people don't seem to realize that we need sex to survive and keep relationships alive. RedClouds has given me great insight over the years into the perverse and diverse nature of human sexuality.

Steve_Xpara
London, U.K.

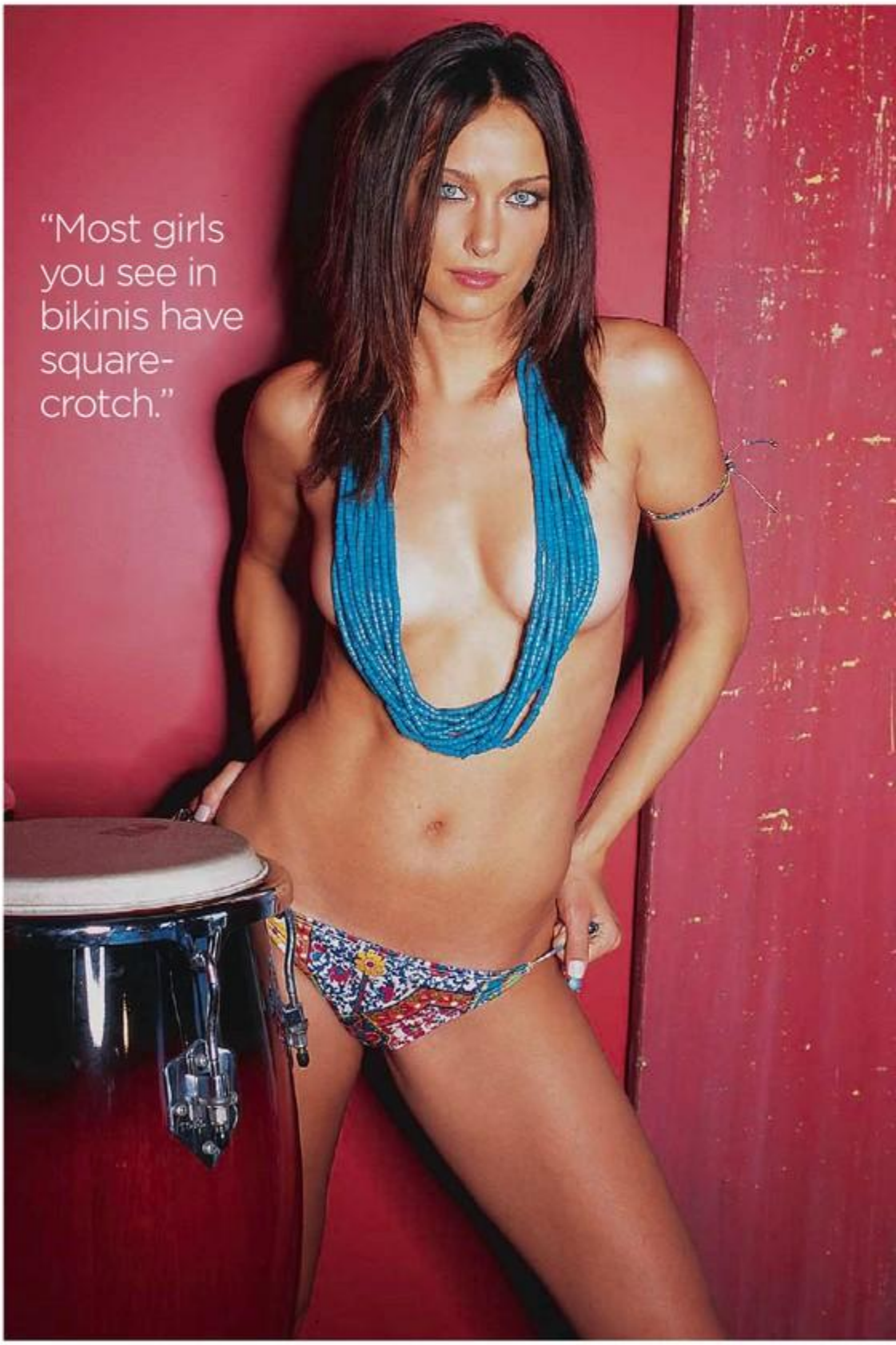
Read more feedback at playboy.com/blog.

babe of the month

Deanna Russo

TIP: TELL HER SHE HAS NICE THIGHS AND FEET

She plays a recurring character on a TV series that has been on the air since the Nixon administration, but we'll wager that PLAYBOY readers are more likely to recognize Deanna Russo from a commercial for Axe body spray. First, the big honking credit: She's Dr. Logan Armstrong on *The Young and the Restless.* No, we don't watch it either. In the deodorant ad, Deanna plays a girl driven by Axe's potent scent to rip her boyfriend's father's clothes off; as she goes in for the kill, she warbles a porny *bow chicka wow wow.* "I was in a drugstore recently, and this couple was looking at Axe products," she recalls. "As I walked by I gave them a *bow chicka wow wow.* They were not amused." You can also catch Deanna in a trio of horror DVDs: *Rest Stop, Believers* and *Ghost Voyage.* "I pretty much die in everything," she admits. "I won't say whether I come back to life." Deanna has also ventured into modeling, but she generally doesn't do swimwear. "Most girls you see in bikinis have square-crotch," she sighs. "When they put their feet together, there's air between their legs. I was born with thighs; it's the Italian curse." Ever since she watched *Kill Bill* with her mother, Deanna has been unjustly critical of her feet as well: "There are scenes where you see Uma Thurman's feet. They're not pretty. My mom said, 'Ugh, she's got feet like yours. Couldn't they have used a foot model?' Thanks, Mom."



PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRIE CHILDERS

half a century of sex appeal

Still Naked After All These Years

TO CELEBRATE HER 50TH BIRTHDAY, THE PERT AND PLAYFUL FEMLIN FROM THE *PARTY JOKES* PAGE FINALLY GETS HER OWN BOOK

Created by LeRoy Neiman and Hef in 1957, Femlin endures as every man's fantasy in miniature, her talent for mischief matched only by her disdain for underwear. With *Femlin 50th Anniversary Collection,* Neiman presents his favorite images of his little lady, with musings on their five decades together. The book is a self-portrait of a man madly in love with his own creation. And since you ask, here's how she got her name: "When I showed him my sketches, Hef exclaimed, 'A gremlin.' 'Strictly feminine,' I rejoined. 'Femlin,' Hef concluded."

seeing stars

Dead Ringers

A PHOTO ARTIST STICKS HER CAMERA WHERE THE PAPARAZZI'S LONGEST LENSES CAN'T GO

Celebrities can't catch a break these days, especially with jokers like Alison Jackson around. Her wry tableaux of celebrity impersonators further *Us Weekly* magazine's point that celebrities are just like us: weird, crass, insecure and ruled by bodily functions. Pick up the book *Alison Jackson Confidential* for irreverent images of Brangelina, Jack and other sitting ducks.

drink of the month

An Old New Yorker

SHAKE IT UP WITH THE SPIRITS OF BARTENDERS PAST

When it comes to cocktails, they don't make 'em like they used to, a fact no one knows better than mixology scribe David Wondrich. In *Imbibe!*, he revisits entries from the first bartender's guide, 1862's *How to Mix Drinks, or The Bon Vivant's Companion*. The recipe below is essentially a 19th century original; as your local merchant is not likely to know quite what you mean by Santa Cruz rum, Wondrich suggests Cruzan Estate Diamond, Mount Gay Eclipse or Angostura 1919. For the curaçao, Grand Marnier or Marie Brizard Orange Curaçao will do the trick.

Knickerbocker

½ lime
2 tsp. raspberry syrup
2 oz. Santa Cruz rum
½ tsp. curaçao

Squeeze the lime juice into a small (6 to 8 oz.) bar glass; also add the rind. Add raspberry syrup, rum and curaçao. Cool with shaved ice, shake well, and ornament with berries in season.

where have you gone, audie murphy?

Filming a War We Don't See

OBVIOUS QUESTIONS FOR BRIAN DE PALMA

In his movie Redacted, Brian De Palma dramatizes the March 2006 rape and murder of a young Iraqi girl by U.S. soldiers. The graphic, polarizing film won De Palma the best director award at the Venice Film Festival. Move over, Michael Moore.

Playboy: Is your movie anti-American?

De Palma: No. It just tries to tell the stories of a group of soldiers involved in a terrible incident and tries to explain what brought them to that crossroads.

Playboy: Is it unsupportive of the troops?

De Palma: The conditions on the ground are very difficult. The soldiers are in a foreign country, they don't understand the culture, they're living under extreme environmental conditions, they can't tell the insurgents from the civilians. The only thing that makes sense to them is following orders and looking after their brothers. That's what bonds them to one another. Then suddenly one of their brothers is killed and they turn their rage on the populace. This is what happens when you send young men to war without a good reason. My movie *Casualties of War* was based on a similar incident in Vietnam.

Playboy: Is this film left-wing propaganda?

De Palma: Everything in my movie I found online, in blogs, video postings and soldiers' wives' websites. I'm trying to bring that reality into the mainstream. Hey, we've been watching propaganda now for six years—there's another side of the story.

Playboy: How do you know you can trust the sources you're talking about?

De Palma: It's hard to refute the pictures. Pictures in *Life* and *Look* magazines and on CBS News are what incited people to take to the streets to protest the war in Vietnam. Why aren't we seeing pictures from Iraq? The architects of this war learned the lessons of Vietnam: Keep the pictures from the people. And that they've done.

fucking fed up

Big Fucking Joke

HANDS OFF OUR FUCKING SIGNS, SAY TOWNSPEOPLE

The sleepy hamlet of Fucking, Austria had a problem: Tourists kept stealing the FUCKING signs. The Fucking citizens fought back with a FUCKING sign set in concrete they hoped would foil disrespectful Fucking visitors. Good fucking luck.

coed of the month

Girl From the North Country

VANCOUVERITE AND CAPILANO STUDENT SARAH PORCHETTA SCHOOLS US ABOOT CANADA, EH?

PLAYBOY: Pardon us, but we've never heard of Capilano College. Do you not have a football team?

SARAH: It's a good school, but no, we don't play football.

PLAYBOY: But it says here you're a cheerleader.

SARAH: Yes. I cheer for the British Columbia Lions.

PLAYBOY: Who?

SARAH: Last season's Canadian Football League champions.

PLAYBOY: Do cheerleaders have to cover up in Canada?

SARAH: We're inside a domed stadium, so our outfits can be very skimpy. We wear little halter tops and orange vinyl boots.

PLAYBOY: Sounds like a good look for a Saturday night out.

SARAH: No, but when I go out I do dress very sexy. I'm good in heels—they make my legs look really long. Sometimes I wear plunging tops, but it's tough because I'm big-breasted. They're real, too. I'm a natural 36C.

PLAYBOY: Do you get a lot of attention at bars?

SARAH: When my girlfriends and I go out, we want all the attention on us. We make total idiots of ourselves. If we want free drinks, we'll get up on the bar and do body shots.

PLAYBOY: Wait a minute—you're only 19. How are you doing body shots on the bar?

SARAH: Remember, the drinking age in British Columbia is 19—that's one thing we've got going for us. That and Boxing Day.

Want to be the next Coed of the Month? Learn how to apply at playboy.com/pose.

onion toast

Perfect Things for Special Someones

THEY WON'T KNOW HOW TO THANK YOU FOR THESE HOT HOLIDAY ITEMS

Have PC, will toast! That's the idea behind DigiPliance's USB Toaster. Simply plug it into your laptop, enter your bread parameters and you'll have perfect toast every time. You'll wonder how you ever got along withou—okay, it's a fake. There is no USB Toaster, only a GotchaBox you can use to camouflage your real gifts this Christmas. You'll be the only one laughing as a friend or relative attempts to thank you for this utterly useless item. Available at—where else?—store.onion.com. (If Grandma doesn't know what USB means, make her feign excitement over the 28-piece stainless-steel whisk set.)

Flipping the Bard

YOU KNEW SHAKESPEARE WAS BAWDY—JUST NOT *THIS* BAWDY

In *Filthy Shakespeare: Shakespeare's Most Outrageous Sexual Puns*, scholar Pauline Kiernan exposes the racy subtext lurking beneath the Bard's every word. Here are some well-known passages and—according to Kiernan—their alternate meanings.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* Puck proclaims:

"I am that merry wanderer of the night.
I jest to Oberon, and make him smile."

Adjusted for puns, his brief self-introduction proves windier: "I am that horny wanderer of the night. I tell fart jokes to Oberon and make him smell them."

In *The Taming of the Shrew,* Petruchio dislikes a dress that has been made for Katharina. She disagrees:

"I never saw a better fashioned gown,
More quaint, more pleasing, nor more commendable."

Adjusted for puns, her rebuttal turns surprisingly crotchety: "I never saw a cunt better fitted to provoke male orgasms, a more well-endowed cunt, more capable of giving sexual pleasure or more praiseworthy."

satellite of love

Take It to the Bridget

A GIRL NEXT DOOR DOES SOME SIRIUS CHATTING

Playboy: Your show on Playboy Radio has a weird name. Can you explain it to us?
Bridget Marquardt: It's called *The Bridget and Wednesday Friday Show.* It airs Fridays at one P.M. ET/10 A.M. PT on Sirius 198, and my co-host is my dog, Wednesday.
Playboy: Does Wednesday contribute anything?
Bridget: She's a little quiet, but I can make her bark if I want to.
Playboy: You're basically flying solo.
Bridget: Yes, but I break the show up into sections. I call the Mansion butlers and order coffee for me and dog food for Winnie, and we talk Mansion gossip. I do a salute to the troops, and I chat about the coolest person I met that week, because I always meet interesting people at Playboy parties. We also have celebrities who stop by.
Playboy: Who's your favorite celebrity guest so far?
Bridget: I love Halloween, so having Cassandra Peterson—Elvira—on the show was a lot of fun. Most of the stuff she did was before my time, but I knew who she was.
Playboy: What does your salute to the troops entail?
Bridget: I talk to a soldier who's in Iraq or Afghanistan. The segment was inspired by my brother, who is a ranger on his third tour of duty in Iraq.
Playboy: Do the soldiers watch you on *The Girls Next Door*?
Bridget: I know there are DVDs over there. I send my brother everything. Not to get up on a soapbox, but I don't care if it's a Muslim country—I'm sending stuff to a U.S. base, and that's all I care about.
Playboy: Does Hef tune in?
Bridget: No, he's not up that early.

technical ecstasy

Looking Sharp

Playmates are perfect, and perfection, as any dictionary will tell you, is that which cannot be improved upon. So is there no way to better the Playmate videos featured in the Playboy Cyber Club? As a matter of fact, there is—by definition, as in high definition. Playmate Xtra videos are now available in HD (that's 720p in geek speak) at cyber.playboy.com. Perfect as always—yet better.

this just innie

Navel Observatory

WHEN HURRICANE BRITNEY HIT THE VMA'S, OUR RABBIT WAS IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

After Britney Spears's uneven return to the stage at the MTV Video Music Awards, everyone and his uncle had an opinion as to what went wrong, why it went wrong and just how wrong it was. Can nobody say a kind word about a woman who just a couple of years ago was America's number-one sex kitten? Fine, we'll do it: Her taste in navel jewelry is impeccable. For $22.50 the very same item can be yours—visit playboystore.com.

all-star roster

Beautiful Gamers

WHO STEAMS UP YOUR SIDELINE?

Back in 2000 *Sports Illustrated* called Playboy.com's first America's Sexiest Sportscaster survey the "season's second most discussed poll," after the presidential election. The *NFL Today* heartthrob Jill Arrington won with 26 percent of the vote, followed by *Monday Night Football*'s Melissa Stark and others, among them Lisa Guerrero, who posed nude in our January 2006 issue. With new babes like ESPN's Erin Andrews (right) beautifying our sports-viewing experience, it's time for a do-over. We're not including any of the Y2K field—let's just say they're all in our Hall of Fame. To peruse the candidates and place your vote, log on to playboy.com/sexiest sportscaster.

RAW DATA

SIGNIFICA, INSIGNIFICA, STATS AND FACTS

what they're thinking

For whom is she really shopping this holiday season? In a *W* magazine poll 38% of female readers said they hid luxury purchases from their partner.

price check

Items taken from Paris Hilton's trash and sold on eBay: empty Coke can, $51; used toothbrush, $305; empty can of Party Animal dog food, $305; two envelopes addressed to her in jail, $510.

Cubicle Queens

48% of American employees say at least one of their co-workers is a "workplace princess" who has an excessive sense of entitlement and expects special favors on the job. 16% say their workplace princess is a man.

Holes in the Net

The Australian government spent $70 million on an Internet porn filter. 30 minutes after it went live, in August, a 16-year-old hacker foiled it.

Guns Aplenty

The United States is the most heavily armed society in the world, with 90 guns for every 100 citizens.

Light Up the Skies

Before lifting the ban on flick lighters in August 2007, the Transportation Security Administration confiscated an average of 22,000 of them a day.

Mobile Impact

The percentage of Americans who say sending text messages while driving is so dangerous it should be outlawed: 90. The percentage who say they send text messages while driving: 57.

Stick With Magazines

27% of Americans did not read a book in the past year.

Hidden Cost

Based on a survey by the U.K. Internet dating service Illicit Encounters, an estimated 260,000 Britons are engaged in an extramarital affair at any given time, spending an average of about $600 a couple for each encounter, on hotel rooms, dinners, clothing, gifts and the like, for a total on pace to exceed $1.4 billion by the end of this year.

Modesty Play

According to ESPN.com's Gregg Easterbrook, the 2006 *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue showcases 123 photographs of women in bikinis; in 63 of them (51%) the models are topless, bottomless or body-painted. In the 2007 edition just 31 of the 114 photographs—27%—depict models striking notably revealing poses.

REVIEWS

movies

the best of the month

[BEOWULF]

A timeless adventure gets an inventive face-lift

"There's a good reason *Beowulf* has been around so long: It's a thrilling story," says Oscar-winning screenwriter Roger Avary. Along with fantasy novelist Neil Gaiman, Avary spent the past decade unlocking the codes of the Old English epic poem about Grendel, the kingdom-stomping monster, and Beowulf, the hero who slays the beast and deals with its vengeful mother. Director Robert Zemeckis supersized the project—described by Gaiman as "a cheerfully violent and strange take on the Beowulf legend"—with digitally enhanced live action and a cast that includes Ray Winstone, Angelina Jolie and Anthony Hopkins. "Zemeckis is like a kid in a candy shop, inventing new technologies to advance the form," says Avary. "We're just the latest in a long line of storytellers, but instead of a warm fire to tell it around, we have the flicker of the silver screen."

[I'M NOT THERE]

This Bob Dylan biography dares to be different

The big, bold, playful mold breaker of this movie season is easily director and co-writer Todd Haynes's brazenly unconventional Bob Dylan biography. Different eras and aspects of the shape-shifting poet-performer-songwriter's life are portrayed by Cate Blanchett, Heath Ledger, Richard Gere, Christian Bale, Ben Whishaw and Marcus Carl Franklin—none of whom plays a character named Bob Dylan, by the way. Haynes's filmmaking style varies; Blanchett's segment is in 1960s black-and-white cinema verité, while Gere's is sort of a splashy 1970s spaghetti Western–meets–*Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*. "I wanted this movie to be like Dylan's music: complex and innovative but entertaining, moving, fun," says Haynes. How will it play to Dylan obsessives? "They may go nuts. This film throws specificity and historical accuracy up in the air and creates a delightful playground where all the Dylan source material is scrambled, twisted and inverted. Audiences who know the least about Dylan will have the most enjoyable viewing because they'll just relax and roll with it."

[LEATHERHEADS]

George Clooney scores with a 1920s-era comedy

The last old-school romantic comedy to come out of Hollywood with zany characters and a dash of slapstick was *Intolerable Cruelty*, and George Clooney and the Coen brothers dropped the ball. That's not stopping director Clooney (who also stars) from going for the end zone with this romantic triangle set during the formation of a national pro football league. *Leatherheads* features Clooney in full Cary Grant mode as the captain of a broken-down team, John Krasinski as Clooney's college recruit and Renée Zellweger as a reporter out to expose the gridiron hotshot as a fraud. Says Krasinski of the flick, "George wanted to get to the heart and vibe of what it meant to be back in the 1920s. His word was *snappy*." And did Clooney pull any of his famous pranks on new guy Krasinski? "He didn't have time. But watch—he'll probably say he's flying me in for the premiere, but I'll land in a totally different country."

by Stephen Rebello

[I AM LEGEND]

Will Smith is the last man on earth

In this latest screen version of Richard Matheson's chilling novel, Will Smith succeeds Vincent Price in *The Last Man on Earth* and Charlton Heston in *The Omega Man,* playing a lonely soul forced to battle nightwalking blood drinkers in a plague-decimated world. Audiences' familiarity with these previous films—as well as latter-day variations like *28 Days Later*—forced director Francis Lawrence and screenwriters Akiva Goldsman and Mark Protosevich to take a new tack. "We're trying to go for a pretty realistic character piece about how a guy learns to survive in this world," says Lawrence. "Two thirds of the movie is Will alone with his German shepherd." But what about the other third, Smith vs. the vampires? Says the director, "We call the creatures 'the infected.' We studied the effect of certain viruses on the body and chose an illness that amps up the metabolism, blows up the adrenal glands and gets the heart rate racing, almost like PCP. We tried keeping that as grounded as possible, too."

[WALK HARD: THE DEWEY COX STORY]

You'll never look at a music biopic the same way

Ray- and *Walk the Line*–type bio-musicals take some good swift karate chops to their Oscar-baiting egos in producer Judd Apatow and director Jake Kasdan's raunchy spoof. John C. Reilly, as fictional twangy music legend Dewey Cox, keeps on a-singin' through a six-decade career of hilarious highs and lows. Aside from Jenna Fischer as Cox's sexy wife, the flick jams in cameos by Paul Rudd as John Lennon, Jack Black as Paul McCartney, Justin Long as George Harrison, Jason Schwartzman as Ringo Starr and Jack White as Elvis. And what pop-rock bio would be complete without scenes of the hero wallowing in sex with, among others, three PLAYBOY Playmates? "We filmed a pretty hard R movie," says Reilly. "Usually I don't even kiss girls in movies, but in this one I had simulated sex with about 20 women, rolling all over the floor. In 24 hours I made out with Angela Little, Cheryl Tiegs and a chimp."

and the best of the rest

Cassandra's Dream

(Colin Farrell, Ewan McGregor, Tom Wilkinson) Woody Allen tries to go gritty in a tale of two cockney brothers—Farrell, a boozy mechanic, and McGregor, a dreamer who runs a restaurant—each desperate to score big money. Turning to their filthy-rich uncle (Wilkinson), they commit a murder with disastrous consequences.

BUZZ

Our call: It doesn't take a Cassandra to foretell that many people won't like this serious Woody as much as *Match Point,* but terrific performances keep it from turning into a nightmare.

Love in the Time of Cholera

(Javier Bardem, Giovanna Mezzogiorno, Benjamin Bratt) In this masochistic love triangle set in turn-of-the-century South America, Bardem is a cocksman who spends half a lifetime in unrequited love with an unattainable woman (Mezzogiorno) who marries a wealthy, beloved doctor (Bratt).

Our call: Even for those addicted to Gabriel García Márquez's novel, this romance refuses to heat up, despite the smoky allure of Mezzogiorno and the great Bardem at full tilt.

The Golden Compass

(Nicole Kidman, Daniel Craig, Eva Green) This adaptation of the first book of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* fantasy trilogy features a heroic young girl who lives among scholars at Oxford University but also inhabits an allegorical universe of witches, strange creatures and human souls that take the form of animals.

Our call: Those who don't groove to the *Harry Potter* flicks and think they are a little junior may find this—presumably the first of a film trilogy—scarier, edgier, gripping and even profound.

The Walker

(Woody Harrelson, Kristin Scott Thomas, Lauren Bacall) From writer-director Paul Schrader comes a sort of continuation of his *American Gigolo.* Harrelson plays a vain gay escort paid to step out with Washington, D.C.'s female elite; he gets in trouble when a senator's wife involves him in a murder case.

Our call: The guilt- and sin-obsessed Schrader presents a stylish follow-up filled with sharp performers and acid-etched dialogue, but it packs all the emotional punch of ice water.

holiday tips

[2007 GIFT GUIDE]

'Tis the season to serve your DVD player some essential shiny platters

The best bang for your boxed-set buck this year, **THE JASON BOURNE COLLECTION** ($50) slips a tricked-out version of last summer's *Ultimatum* (pictured) into a metallic-finish casing along with *Identity* and *Supremacy*. Not to be out-Q'd, the 007 folks have come up with **THE JAMES BOND ULTIMATE COLLECTOR'S SET** ($240). This handsomely packaged comprehensive collection has the definitive editions of the first 20 films, plus last year's *Casino Royale*. Completists of a conspiracy-theorizing bent will enjoy **THE X-FILES: THE COMPLETE COLLECTOR'S EDITION** ($330). It includes all nine seasons, the *X-Files* feature film, a comic book and more. **STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION—THE COMPLETE SERIES** ($440) unveils new featurettes, and the translucent package would warm a Borg queen's heart. If that isn't enough LeVar Burton for you, consider **ROOTS: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION** ($120), which provides the original *Roots* miniseries and its fine *Next Generations* follow-up, as well as a David Frost interview with author Alex Haley. New interviews—series creator David Lynch chats over coffee and cherry pie—and the inclusion of the hard-to-find pilot episode and the out-of-print first season ensure the **TWIN PEAKS DEFINITIVE GOLD BOX EDITION** ($100) a spot on our list. And with Harrison Ford due back for *Indiana Jones 4*, **THE ADVENTURES OF YOUNG INDIANA JONES COLLECTION, VOLUME ONE** ($118) seems a must too. Much hailed but cancelled after 30 episodes, it debuts with 38 featurette documentaries. For the classics fan, **FORD AT FOX** ($300) presents 24 of the films John Ford directed for 20th Century Fox between 1921 and 1952—*The Iron Horse* and *My Darling Clementine* among them—plus a book filled with reproductions of poster and lobby-card art. Comedy fans will shed tears of joy at the release of **SEINFELD: THE COMPLETE SERIES** ($284), which includes all 180 episodes, a coffee-table book and a bonus disc featuring the first cast-reunion roundtable. Finally, the **WARNER HOME VIDEO DIRECTOR'S SERIES: STANLEY KUBRICK** ($80) packages extras-loaded special editions of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Shining*, *Full Metal Jacket* and *Eyes Wide Shut*. Picky present hunters can purchase each DVD separately, too, as well as on HD DVD and Blu-ray. *—Greg Fagan*

SUPERBAD Booze, babes and the phrase *dick mouth*—what more could you ask from a sex comedy about a wild night in the lives of three boys fumbling toward adulthood? Delivering the laughs as well as a sweet sincerity with its mature themes, this smartly silly raunch fest isn't your papa's *Porky's*. Also available in an unrated director's cut and Blu-ray. **Best extra:** The wrap-party gag reel. ¥¥¥¥

—Stacie Hougland

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: AT WORLD'S END As Johnny Depp's Captain Jack Sparrow unites with the Pirate Lords to save their ranks, they're upstaged by a cameo from Jack's dad (Keith Richards) and nearly drown in digital effects. Watch after the credits for a fun glimpse into the future of two characters. Also on Blu-ray. **Best extra:** A look into Depp's friendship with Richards. ¥¥½

—Bryan Reesman

SICKO Michael Moore performs a thorough colonoscopy on our lack of national health care in his latest documentary, allowing humiliated victims of the system to tell their hellish HMO stories. The director asks, Where is the outrage? Fortunately, Moore is measured, not shrill, and save for taking neglected 9/11 first responders to Cuba for treatment, he's stunt-free. **Best extra:** Thirty minutes of outtakes. ¥¥¥

—Buzz McClain

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND: 30TH ANNIVERSARY ULTIMATE EDITION Steven Spielberg's 1977 sci-fi classic is the director's first film to be released in high-def, and the maestro chose Blu-ray. This set features all three versions of the movie, including the long-unseen original theatrical release, never before on home video. **Best extra:** An exclusive new interview with Spielberg. ¥¥¥¥

—Matt Steigbigel

tease frame

Alyssa Milano broke out on *Who's the Boss?* before sexing herself up in teen temptress roles. Prior to a detour back to tween fare with *Charmed*, Milano fought off erotic vampire cravings—and her blouse—in 1995's *Embrace of the Vampire* (pictured). Next she'll sink her teeth into *Pathology*, a thriller about med students trying to commit the perfect murder.

activist rock

[REDEMPTION SONGS]

Wyclef Jean's new album, *Carnival II: Memoirs of an Immigrant,* mixes hot topics with hot beats

Humanitarian causes have increasingly taken center stage for former Fugees mastermind Wyclef Jean, a Haitian immigrant who moved to the United States when he was nine. Though his latest LP features hip-hop heavyweights such as Akon, Lil Wayne and Mary J. Blige, his vision attracts audiences as diverse as his sound: Bill Clinton was spotted dancing in the aisle at a recent show in Aspen.

Q: Why did you get involved in efforts to eradicate AIDS?

A: For me the AIDS message just comes from visiting Haiti and parts of Africa and Brazil and seeing where the world is going. I've seen people affected by this; people I went to school with have died of AIDS. When that happens, it's like, Holy shit, this hits close to home. It's personal. AIDS kills. It is on a rampage in Africa, killing everything that's moving. I want to help people understand the seriousness of it.

Q: How can hip-hop help?

A: Hip-hop is the voice of the young generation. We can tell kids to do things without sounding preachy. If you're a kid getting peer pressure not to strap up—"I gotta get it raw; my man's doing it, so I gotta do it"—and then you hear a song telling you to protect yourself, you're more likely to do it. There is a definite void in politics right now, so if we don't step up, nobody will.

Q: Are hip-hop artists practicing what they preach?

A: Yeah, I think so. We're watching a lot of different people in the industry dying from AIDS, and everyone has a consciousness to protect themselves.

Q: You've rhymed about what you'd do if you were president. Have you ever considered entering politics?

A: My realm of politics is music. I think we can influence a lot through music. When you put this CD on, it's like you're listening to the BBC or *CNN World News.* But I'm still young. If I'm ever old and have long hair and a big gut, maybe I'll go be a prime minister or some shit like that.

[OLD ROTTENHAT]

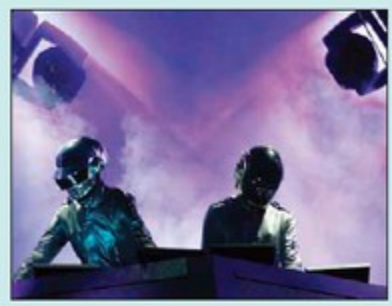
Robert Wyatt's latest shows the value of a musical career

In this era of Aly & AJ, when a pop musician's career spans six months and the latest flavor is moved off the shelves for the next round of one-offs, it's a rare musician who has staying power. Brontosaurus acts have the option of treading the same old ground (see Paul McCartney) or subjecting themselves to even worse treatment (see Rod Stewart). Unlike jazz artists and classical musicians, pop stars can expect only to fade away or keep pushing the same buttons until someone tells them to stop. Thankfully, Robert Wyatt is an exception.

His career began 40 years ago when he made a splash as drummer for Soft Machine, a cerebral prog-rock outfit from Canterbury, U.K. Wyatt went on to record a series of classic solo albums during the 1970s and 1980s, distinguished mostly by his agitprop songs and fragile yet plaintive voice. His music has expanded much over the past four decades. While his work today still embraces some of the jazzy progressiveness of Soft Machine (and its bebop forebears), it has assumed greater emotional depth. *Comicopera,* recorded mostly in Wyatt's Lincolnshire home, is an adult album. Neither a mere collection of singles nor a grandiloquent concept album, it is an organic work of maturity and richness of feeling. As an experienced artist, Wyatt doesn't fear mistakes, nor is he afraid to take risks. (He has recently taken up the cornet, for example, which he plays to great effect here.) Wyatt's percussion delivers a rhythmic punch that sustains the disc, and his keyboard work provides a welcome unfinished quality to the music. The sterling musicianship on *Comicopera* is surpassed only by the relaxed intelligence of the music and lyrics. It makes a listener wonder what other old-timers might have done had they been given a chance to develop.

man vs. machine

Since returning to the stage at the Coachella festival in 2006, Daft Punk has perfected a transcendent live show. The French duo's summer tour finale—in a beachfront minor league baseball stadium at Brooklyn's famous Coney Island—had 12,000 revelers going bonkers, dancing throughout a set of chopped-up versions of the combo's signature dissonant filtered electro house. Now comes *Alive 2007,* a recording of Daft Punk's first show in 10 years in hometown Paris, performed



before a crowd of 18,000 this past June. The album is also available in a double-disc set with five extra tracks and a 50-page photo book. And given the show's extraordinary pyramid stage and lights, you'll want pictures.

DOWNLOAD A FREE ROBERT WYATT TRACK AT PLAYBOY.COM/MAGAZINE/CDS.

readers' delights

[A BANQUET OF BOOKS FOR THE HOLIDAY]

Eat, drink and be literary

What better source of food for thought than books? And since it's Christmas, the giving season, we thought we'd offer you a varied feast of reads. The best part is there are no trans fats; there's nothing to get stuck in your teeth, nothing to regret. Since any meal is lackluster without cocktails, we'll open with **IMBIBE!** by David Wondrich (see *After Hours*, "Drink of the Month," page 24). It provides engaging, idiosyncratic instructions for more than 100 concoctions and is a complete, lively history of the drink, as well as a tribute to Jerry Thomas, the great mixologist and father of the American bar. Think of these next two options as starters: **MOUTH WIDE OPEN** by John Thorne with Matt Lewis Thorne will seduce you and your foodie friends with its style, know-how and fine storytelling. Its sumptuous, detailed descriptions of the pleasures of bone marrow, making marmalade and frying falafel blend perfectly with Gillian Riley's **OXFORD COMPANION TO ITALIAN FOOD.** This readable and Batali-blessed (he wrote the foreword) compendium of culture and culinary terms, cheeses and herbs will afford its reader an expertise in the kitchen, at the table and while touring the country that Shelley called "the most sublime and lovely contemplation that can be conceived by the imagination of man." Liberal amounts of the sublime, imagination and more are applied in **NOBEL LECTURES: FROM THE LITERATURE LAUREATES, 1986 TO 2006.** This collection of acceptance speeches runs from the light and nostalgic (in the case of Orhan Pamuk's talk) to the acid and excoriating (as in Harold Pinter taking the opportunity to condemn the United States for crimes against humanity) and, as a vital record of the intellectual and literary achievements of the past 20 years, is as substantive as beef stew and as challenging to the heart and mind as frogs legs are to the palate. But for real grit, the literary equivalent of roughage, and lots of it, sink into **THE BLACK LIZARD BIG BOOK OF PULPS,** the fattest collection of classic noir out there. Stories like Chandler's "Wise Guy" and Norbert Davis's "You'll Die Laughing" will chase the squatting sugarplum fairies from your head—for good. That should leave room for Orwell, Nietzsche, Chesterton and all the thinkers on whom *Idler* founder Tom Hodgkinson relies in his **FREEDOM MANIFESTO.** It's an anarchic exhortation to simplify, to reject careerism and mindless consumption, to ride a bike and drink good ale (not at the same time) that is both provocative and as fun as flan.

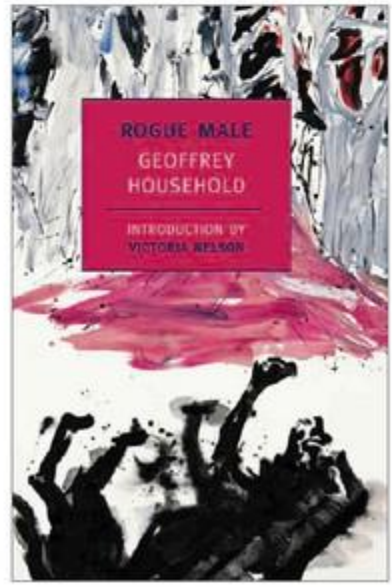
CÉNARD DUBOIS

manhunt of the month

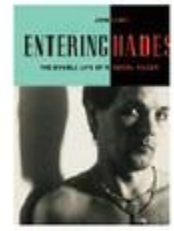
[ROGUE MALE by Geoffrey Household]

Do beastly acts make a man a beast?

This NYRB reissue of the 1939 classic is the quintessential cat-and-mouse thriller. The plot is simple and unbearably suspenseful: An English sportsman tries to assassinate a European dictator, who is unnamed (like the hero) but clearly Hitler. The attempt fails. He is tortured, makes a desperate escape and then is hunted. Like the best practitioners of the genre—John Buchan (*The Thirty-Nine Steps*) and Robert Ludlum (*The Bourne Identity*)—Household renders his hero an intellectually complex, alienated outsider, allegorical yet wholly recognizable. Even as he flees back to Britain, the narrator remains quarry and outlaw: "Living as a beast, I had become as a beast," he records in his journal. The anonymous man is tracked by the dictator's police and British intelligence—including a fiendishly clever and cruel adversary, Major Quive-Smith. In the end, the man becomes an exile from civilization itself, the embodiment of metaphysical transcendence. If all this sounds too philosophical, it isn't. Household boils down his narrative to its rawest elements, and the effect is gut-wrenching. ¥¥¥¥ *—Carmela Ciuraru*



ENTERING HADES • John Leake
This anatomy of an antihero describes a psychopath worthy of Patricia Highsmith's fiction—a Mr. Ripley with media savvy. Jack Unterweger didn't get away with murder the first time he tried it, but almost: He penned an account that captivated the cognoscenti and in 1990 won his early release. When he started killing again, in L.A. and Vienna, no one suspected him initially. After all, he was charming, a writer, an expert. Who says serial killers act alone? ¥¥¥ *—A.G. Loyd*



HOW THE IRISH INVENTED SLANG
Daniel Cassidy
How could Irish Americans, for all their sod-carrying numbers, leave such a small trace on our language? Cassidy says they haven't and proceeds to find Gaelic roots for much of American slang. Etymologists may not agree that *jerk* comes from *déirceach* (pronounced jér-kah, Gaelic for "bum"), but this is still an intriguing read. ¥¥¥½
—Leopold Froehlich

play fighting

[MAKE WAR, NOT LOVE]

The thinking man's guide to blowing up the world

Few video games, especially ones about running around shooting people, are judged by the big ideas they put forward. But this season's slate of shooters tries to dig deeper than just "go there, kill that." To help you ride into the holidays with guns blazing, here's a guide to which games are intellectual killing sprees and which are death warmed over. Pictured clockwise from top left:

ARMY OF TWO

Premise: You're one of a heavily armed pair of testosterrific Blackwater-esque mercenaries out to make bank as hyper-macho modern-day guns for hire.
Underlying philosophy: War is a multibillion-dollar business. All you need to get a piece of the pie is a giant set of balls.
Takeaway: What's more fun than hitting the strip clubs or playing poker with a buddy? Killing for money.
Fun: 8 (out of 10) **Smarts:** 4

CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

Premise: Command Special Forces units to stop a Russian nationalist from returning his country to Communist rule.
Underlying philosophy: Politics is boring. Modern weapons, on the other hand, are awesome.
Takeaway: We'd take today's Army over World War II's any day.
Fun: 9 **Smarts:** 3

HAZE

Premise: You are a mercenary who gets pumped full of reality-altering drugs to make you less vulnerable and feel better about killing. All is well until you kick the habit.
Underlying philosophy: Don't trust blindly, life isn't a video game, and war isn't pretty.
Takeaway: Making others OD is fun, especially when they're trying to kill you.
Fun: 7 **Smarts:** 8

WORLD IN CONFLICT

Premise: In 1989 the Soviet Union invades the West Coast, in this strategy-game version of Reaganomics vs. the politburo.
Underlying philosophy: The most interesting thing about the 1980s was potential annihilation, but glasnost ruined all that.
Takeaway: *Red Dawn* was okay as a movie, but it makes for a far better game.
Fun: 8 **Smarts:** 4

—Brian Crecente

MANHUNT 2 (PS2, Wii) In this controversial horror sequel, you play a psychotic killer on a murder spree. Delayed so it could be toned down for a Mature rating, this is essentially the same game with some blurring of the truly nasty bits. A heavy dose of nihilistic sadism, it's decently executed, if that's your thing. ¥¥¥ *—Scott Jones*

THE SIMPSONS GAME (360, PS2, PS3, Wii) This hybrid puzzle-platform-beat-'em-up isn't *Citizen Kane*, but with the show's writers and voice talent on board there's enough quality to keep fans happy. Dead-on video-game parodies abound, and the co-op mode allows you to share the joy with friends. ¥¥¥ *—Marc Saltzman*

TIMESHIFT (360, PC, PS3) This futuristic shooter lets you manipulate time to reverse losing battles, fast-forward past deadly areas and pause to sneak up and snuff enemy troopers. *TimeShift*'s convoluted story line and ho-hum guns don't add much to the genre, but the slo-mo carnage is legitimately amazing. ¥¥¥ *—Damon Brown*

THE WITCHER (PC) Master multiple combat styles, summon fireballs to fry werewolves or flesh-eating arachnids and brew up potions in this romp through classic fantasy tropes. It won't convert D&D haters, but closet paladins will appreciate the emphasis on moral ambiguity and meaningful consequences. ¥¥¥ *—Scott Steinberg*

RATCHET & CLANK FUTURE: TOOLS OF DESTRUCTION (PS3) The pair's first next-gen outing has them on a quest to suss out Ratchet's mysterious origins. The gameplay is more epic in scope, the mayhem more intense, and no other game lets you morph enemies into penguins and then make them do the hustle. ¥¥¥½ *—S.J.*

ROCK BAND (360, PS3) Take the *Guitar Hero* concept (use a custom peripheral to play your favorite music), expand it to include drums, bass and vocals and you have *Rock Band*. With a killer song list, four-player co-op mode and copious downloadable content, it may be the best party game ever. ¥¥¥¥ *—Scott Alexander*

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Topless Model

The inimitable Porsche 911 Turbo loses its roof

WHEN THE WORLD first glimpsed the Porsche 911, the year was 1964. November 10, to be exact. It was an exciting time for sports cars, with Jaguar E-types and rare Ferrari 275 GTBs tearing up the roads. The new Porsche caused a sensation. It was "the Porsche to end all Porsches" (as *Car and Driver* put it). Cars come and go, but not the 911. The Stuttgart company has spent the past 43 years perfecting this iconic street rocket, making it better with each generation. New this season: a cabriolet version of the latest-gen 911 Turbo, an incredibly slick machine PLAYBOY picked as best sports coupe in our annual *Cars of the Year* feature this past January. Now you can enjoy all that staggering performance with the wind in your hair. Stats: 3.6-liter six-cylinder boxer engine that pumps out 480 bhp at 6,000 rpm. With Tiptronic S transmission (a six-speed manual is also available), you'll sprint from zero to 100 kilometers an hour (62 mph) in 3.8 seconds and top out at 310 kilometers an hour (192 mph). Unlike the 1964 model, which tended to oversteer, this all-wheel-drive 911 grips the road. We took it for a spin in the Catskill Mountain foothills with the top down, screaming through sweeping bends and into tight switchbacks. Dark clouds on the horizon? We hit a button and the soft top closed in 20 seconds. This Porsche is a bargain at $137,000. More info at porsche.com.

Putting the X Back in Xmas

LIKE MOST OF the good things about the holidays, the old mistletoe trick dates to pagan times. If you like the way this bit of floral folderol can catalyze amorous interludes, try one of these more obscure traditions. **Secret Swingin' Santa** On slips of paper write various verbs (example: stroke) and the names of guests (example: Natasha). Deposit verb slips in one stocking and name slips in another. Guests pull one slip from each stocking. Is it better to give or receive? **Dirty Dreidel** In a combination of strip poker and the Hanukkah pastime, players ante up a garment with each spin of the top. Hint: The character you want is gimel. **Naughty Nativity** For a favorite among swingers, furries and cosplay fetishists, have friends dress in provocative interpretations of angel outfits, livestock getups and period garb. Spin the Yule log until things get sacrilegious.

A Cut Above

WE TESTED THE worth of this Montecristo-branded steak knife (set of six and wooden case, $150; available at retail tobacconists nationwide) against a tough overcooked porterhouse and found a new best friend. It's not just that the German 440C stainless-steel blade sliced through the hardened flesh quickly. It was the perfectly weighted hand feel, the panache with which it severed gristle from bone. As the Porsche above transforms your morning commute, so will this blade turn the gnarliest steak into an experience.

In Pod We Trust

SOME PEOPLE BALK at paying more for their iPod dock than they did for their iPod. The colloquial term for these people is *morons.* If you want to listen out loud and watch with friends, do yourself a favor and pony up for a good experience. From top: **Altec Lansing inMotion iMV712** ($350, alteclansing.com): For sharing the show or watching hands-free, this 8.5-inch LCD screen with three-speaker audio system is a great choice. Wrapped in a handsome piano-black finish, it allows you to plug in audio and video from non-iPod sources. **Harman/Kardon Go + Play** ($350, harmankardon.com): For those who want to take the party with them, this boom box nouveau runs on batteries or AC power and packs a pair of rear-firing woofers plus 30-watt tweeters to deliver serious audio ammo. Rock, hip-hop and jazz all feel substantial, even in wide-open spaces. **Bowers & Wilkins Zeppelin** ($600, bowers-wilkins.com): This two-foot-wide stainless-steel sculpture reproduces music with both power and subtlety, thanks to audiophile-quality tweeters and midrange drivers on each side, as well as a substantial subwoofer. There's enough power here to fill even a large room easily, and tricky digital-signal processing automatically tweaks the audio output for the volume you've chosen, whether it's Regina Spektor across the table or Page, Plant and Bonham (we couldn't resist) from 30 feet away.

Lounge Act

HEY, WANT TO come back to my place and check out the orgy?" Now there's a pickup line. The Orgy sofa and ottoman ($14,000, karimrashidshop.com) from design star Karim Rashid are beautiful pad pieces with a built-in theme. The rounded sofa back facilitates relaxed interaction, and when you slide the ottoman in, you get ample surface area for you and your friends to stay comfortable even in the most strenuous of contortions. Now that's putting some funk into function.

Fuzz Buster

HALFWAY BETWEEN HIGH-tech and classic design lies the Fusion Chrome Collection. Gillette teamed with the Art of Shaving to create this razor ($125), stand ($100) and badger-hair brush ($25, theartofshaving.com). A gleaming crosshatch grip harks back to Gillette's old Super Speed safety razor. Timeless.

Action Jackson

FIVE THINGS YOU may not know about Wyoming's Jackson Hole Mountain Resort: (1) It has 4,139 vertical feet of skiing, the most continuous lift-served terrain in North America. (2) Half the slopes are expert. Jackson Hole is regarded as the nation's most-likely-to-break-your-leg resort. (3) The new Couloir Restaurant and Bar opens this season, at the top of Bridger Gondola Summit (9,095-foot elevation)—swanky dining with views of the stars and Corbet's Couloir, often called America's scariest ski slope. (4) The resort's first eco-boutique hotel, Hotel Terra (from $395 a night, hotelterrajacksonhole.com) opens at the base this month: romantic rooms, a fine wine list, a reduced carbon footprint, a walk to the gondola. (5) Until you've skied this mecca, you haven't lived.

Getting Waisted

DRESSING IS LIKE painting, with you as the canvas. A good suit provides the background, but as in art, the details make or break your work. The correct application of accessories separates kitsch from masterpiece. Your belt, naturally, holds it all together. Ermenegildo Zegna Couture offers these brilliant examples (from left) in brown alligator ($495), black leather ($125) and rich pony hair and leather ($520). More information at zegna.com.

Silky Smooth

TIES ARE A focal point for your creation. Rep stripes, whether to signal membership in an elite club or to show the audacity of the wearer, never go out of style, as evidenced by these two specimens. The middle tie, from Canali ($120, www.canali.it), offers a late-autumn feel, while the Ermenegildo Zegna tie, on the right ($150, zegna.com), is tastefully reminiscent of a candy cane. The tie on the left, from Valentino ($150, valentino.com), is a rich pink that will pop equally well against navy and charcoal. As with your friends, pick your knots wisely; they need to complement your collar. A four-in-hand is great for point collars, a half Windsor works on anything, and a full Windsor makes good use of a wide spread collar.

En Brogue

FINALLY COME THE shoes. After the black oxford, the classic brown wingtip, or brogue, is the most versatile shoe to have on hand or, in this case, foot. This one from Canali (top, $580, www.canali.it) fits the bill with simple, unassuming lines that don't compete for the spotlight. Monk straps, like this black one from Ermenegildo Zegna Couture (middle, $675), are appropriate for fine suits and offer a refreshing departure from lace-ups. On rare occasions you can meld the two, as Fratelli Rossetti (bottom, $525, rossetti.it) does with this dip-dyed beauty. (Note the subtle depth of pigment concentrated at the toe.)

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The Playboy Advisor

My wife and I have been together for 11 years. She recently escorted a school group to Europe for 10 days. Because she was so busy, she sent me only three or four e-mails and never called. I looked at her itinerary a few times to see where she was, but I never missed her. I would think 10 days without your spouse would wreck a person, but I felt indifferent. I love my wife, so why do I not care if she's away?—S.B., Sugar Land, Texas

If you had been together for only a year, we would have read your reaction differently. But after 11 years as a couple, 10 days is a blip. As Sartre would attest, anyone forced to share space for any length of time with another human being—spouse, roommate, cell mate—revels in the occasional solitude. Unless you felt indifferent even after your wife's return, your not pining for her during a short absence (nor her for you) only tells us you are in a mature relationship.

A reader in September said he had purchased a 62-inch DLP television and needed a surge protector. With rear-projection televisions it is best to buy not only a surge protector but also a battery backup: A power failure will prevent the fan from cooling the lamp bulb, which can cost $200 or more to replace. Many low-end battery-backup units are designed only for computers, so look for true or pure sine-wave output, which silences line noise and offers better protection against spikes. I use a Tripp Lite 1000, and my DLP set still worked even after lightning took down the power line behind my house.—D.G., Farmington Hills, Michigan

We should have mentioned this because the lamps are expensive. Texas Instruments, which invented DLP, has been trying to get manufacturers to agree to a standard design so the bulbs can be mass-produced, but it's slow going.

My husband of 20 years says he sometimes fantasizes about his female massage therapist and believes she is attracted to him as well. He insists all men fantasize this way. Sometimes I am Jennifer Lopez; other times I am a Playmate. I don't mind that, but when the fantasy is about someone you know and have regular contact with, I feel it is inappropriate—it's an emotional affair with the hope that it will become physical. What is your perspective? Does every guy do this?—D.G., Thornton, Colorado

Of course. The fantasies are richer if you have met the woman. Appreciate the fact that your husband is being honest with you about his erotic daydreams, which run through his brain like a ticker tape. Most men never talk about these sexual thoughts, because women seem to believe we don't recognize the difference between fantasy and reality (e.g., men are well aware that Centerfolds are idealized

forms perfected by makeup and lighting). If your husband had anything going on with his therapist besides the occasional romp in his head, he wouldn't be talking about her. Regardless of whether you approve, your husband will meet women he finds attractive, just as you will meet appealing men. That's one of the challenges of marriage—enjoying these crushes and wondering what might have been but ultimately walking away because you have built something more valuable at home. Another challenge of marriage is trusting your spouse to do the same.

The strength of my boyfriend's erection varies considerably during foreplay and intercourse: One minute he's rock hard, then semi-hard and then hard again right before orgasm. How do erections work? Should I be concerned?—M.D., Lawrence, Kansas

Erections must be fed. It's normal during foreplay for a man to go soft sometimes. A naughty little trick you might try is to keep him erect with your hand or mouth after he comes but before he goes flaccid and then try for another go. He'll be sensitive, so take it slow.

I've heard taking multivitamins can be dangerous for men. Is that true?—H.N., Provo, Utah

"Dangerous" is too strong a word. However, some researchers have expressed concern that supplements may interfere with our natural defenses against disease. In a controversial analysis, five doctors reviewed 68 studies of beta-carotene, vitamin A and vitamin E and found no convincing evidence that they improve long-term health when taken as supplements. In fact, they appear to increase mortality. The jury is out on vitamin C. Another study involving 295,344 older men found that taking more than one multivitamin a day is associated with advanced prostate cancer; however, it is not associated with localized cancer, which is the most easily controlled and cured. The researchers suggested men take no more than the recommended dose, which is typically one a day. While we're on the topic, in 1996 we reported that scientists had found that men who eat at least four servings of tomato-based foods each week cut their risk of prostate cancer by 20 percent. Tomatoes contain lycopene, an antioxidant often included in multivitamins marketed to men. But a new study of 28,000 men ages 55 to 74 has found that those with higher lycopene levels have the same chance of developing prostate cancer. It also notes that the beta-carotene in tomatoes may increase the risk of tumors. As so often happens with medical research, you end up where you started.

I would like to have a threesome with a woman who is a good friend. When I mentioned this to my husband he became excited. The next evening, he ran out to get milk and came back without the milk but with my friend and some booze. It didn't happen, partly because I feel it is my place to initiate a threesome that involves another woman. What do you think?—A.V., Evanston, Wyoming

So next time you go for the milk.

About a week ago my girlfriend and I came out of a theater and started walking across the parking lot to our car. Just ahead of us we noticed a couple arguing. The man was drunk and talking loudly, but I made a quick assessment and knew they posed no harm. As we passed them my girlfriend picked up her pace until she was walking ahead of me. After we got in the car, I asked her why she had decided to flee rather than seek my physical security. Isn't a woman supposed to feel safer with her man? And since mine doesn't, what does that say about me? I had thought I was a rottweiler in her eyes, but I guess I'm just a shivering Chihuahua.—R.B., Seattle, Washington

You are making far too much of this. Your girlfriend isn't comparing you with a guard dog; she's measuring you against the safety of a steel-and-glass enclosure that can remove her from an uncomfortable situation.

While my husband of four years and I were vacationing, he informed me he was unhappy with our sex life. I told him to make a list of his fantasies and I would see what we could do. The items ranged from my fucking him with a strap-on to golden showers to getting a happy ending at a massage parlor. I have been able to fulfill all his requests except for a threesome, which I am trying to arrange. The problem is that since I began working down

ILLUSTRATION BY ISTVAN BANYAI

the list, he has lost interest in having sex with me. I have always been adventurous in bed, but he can't maintain an erection unless it involves an item from his list. He says he no longer enjoys the "regular" sex we have and can no longer climax via intercourse (though we still enjoy mutual masturbation). What can I do to help him find his sexual center but also meet my needs?—T.S., Phoenix, Arizona

Where's your list? Your husband should have asked for it long ago and given it his full attention, even if you desire only regular sex. The problem now is that unless he changes his view of you from plaything to lover, the relationship will not advance.

Do you put only red wines into a decanter? What are the benefits?—R.R., San Diego, California

Decanting typically benefits only big young reds (by removing a bit of their tannic bite) and older reds that contain sediment. Slowly pour the wine into the decanter so the cloudy parts stay at the bottom of the bottle. It helps to have backlight.

Some people would have you believe you can't buy a diamond that hasn't caused someone to suffer or die. Where can I find a bloodless diamond for my girlfriend's engagement ring?—K.A., Orlando, Florida

Although safeguards are in place, you can't say with certainty that a diamond did not originate in a war zone unless you dig it up yourself or buy a stone created in a lab. Cultured diamonds cost less and, because of the way they're made (by speeding up a natural process), are not considered fakes; this year the Gemological Institute of America offered for the first time to grade them. The two largest manufacturers are Gemesis (gemesis.com), which compresses carbon at high temperatures, and Apollo Diamond (apollodiamond.com), which uses diamond fragments as seeds to which carbon particles are attached.

Earlier this year a man wrote to say his dominatrix wife had shown a tape of his being disciplined to two of her girlfriends, who proceeded to suck him off. In July another reader scolded you for printing the letter, dismissing it as a typical "sissy–female domme fantasy." Part of my punishment when I get home after a day of wearing my wife's panties under my clothes is a spanking and being tied to the posts of our bed for a blow job with the video camera rolling. My wife showed one tape to her best friend, who now wants to join the fun. So it does happen.—R.S., Pahrump, Nevada

We have no doubt, although on further reflection the second girlfriend is a bit much.

I am a 20-year-old college student. My parents are wealthy, so I get a hefty allowance. I'm not saying that to be snobby; it's just a fact. My best friend has to work for his pocket money. Whenever we take a cab together, I pay, and we don't discuss it. When we order takeout, he usually says he's out of cash, and I say he can pay me back, but I let it slide—I would feel like a cheapskate to ask him for the $10 or $15. What is the proper thing to do?—E.S., New York, New York

If you can afford to be generous, be generous, especially with friends. If he starts to abuse the privilege, that's a different matter. It doesn't sound as though he has.

My favorite sexual fantasy is to oil wrestle with my wife. She has indulged me by getting oiled up, but she refuses to wrestle. She feels I want to control her, which is not true. The object is not to hurt each other but just to engage in playful holds and pins. Is there any way I can get her to try? I find it erotic to see her oiled and ready to rumble but frustrating if she won't go to the mat with me.—D.M., Aurora, Colorado

That's too bad; it sounds like fun. In mixed erotic oil wrestling, as it's known to fans, the woman is in charge, sitting on her opponent's face, pinning him, making him squirm. Perhaps you could show your wife a few of the many erotic wrestling websites to give her an idea of what goes down. She may be more receptive to hitting the mat if she can call the shots, especially if she's pissed at you for some reason. We're not saying you should purposely be a jerk, but "Why don't you kick my ass?" is a challenge many wives would find hard to pass up.

Because I was tired of the lack of leadership at the company I worked for, I went back to school at the age of 50 to get an MBA. However, I am concerned I will be no better a leader than my ex-boss. Do you have any advice on how to improve my leadership skills? Any books or seminars? Maybe I should have responded to my midlife crisis by having a fling or buying a Porsche.—R.M., Salt Lake City, Utah

The MBA will take you further. You are on your way to being a fine leader just by noting what your former boss did poorly. Because time is money, subscribe to a service such as Soundview (summary.com), which provides summaries of the latest best-sellers on leadership and business. You will have more ideas than you know what to do with. That said, book learnin' goes only so far. You have to hit the trenches and make and correct your own mistakes. Good luck.

Mashed potatoes and gravy, peanut butter and jelly, sauvignon blanc and trout—everyone knows certain tastes complement each other. Has there been a study to find out what flavored lubes go best with pussy?—D.N., Maricopa, Arizona

Your letter sounds like a show tune. We love how women taste.

My wife and I have been married for two years and have just had a child. I knew we wouldn't have sex for a while after the birth, so I stopped asking. I came home from work a few days ago and noticed the box of adult movies and toys in our closet had been moved. Jokingly I noted someone had been a bad girl, and I pointed out the box. My wife's response shocked me. She said, "I am so embarrassed. I meant to put those back." I am okay with the fact that she masturbates—I'm even turned on by the idea—but the toys and movies were always something we shared. What bothers me is that while I thought our sex life had slowed down, it appears the only thing that has is her desire for me.—M.C., Clearwater, Florida

Now, now. We would not reach this conclusion based on what you describe. Instead, we see your wife's diddling as a hopeful sign that your sex life will soon be back on track. She's taking a few warm-up laps—perhaps she is self-conscious about her postbaby body, or maybe she just needed a quick release between feedings. Let her know you find her irresistible and can't wait to be intimate again.

I'm 27 and have been dating a girl for a while. She is possible marriage material but is inherently unhealthy. Her grandmother had breast cancer, her mother died of breast cancer, and she has had skin cancer and been hospitalized multiple times. Is this a reason to question my future with her, or am I being overly cautious? I've seen what losing a mother or spouse can do to a family.—D.K., Fremont, Nebraska

She could get hit by a bus, too.

I'd like to encourage the woman who wrote in August because she and her husband wanted to bring another man into the bedroom but felt uncomfortable about it. My husband has medical issues that limit his sexual abilities, so we have included other men in our capers. My husband enjoys seeing me get screwed, especially when I blow him at the same time. We have had three men so far, and each one has brought something new to the mix. Our most recent lover invited his 18-year-old son, with our permission. So have fun, girl. You only live once.—L.G., Birmingham, Alabama

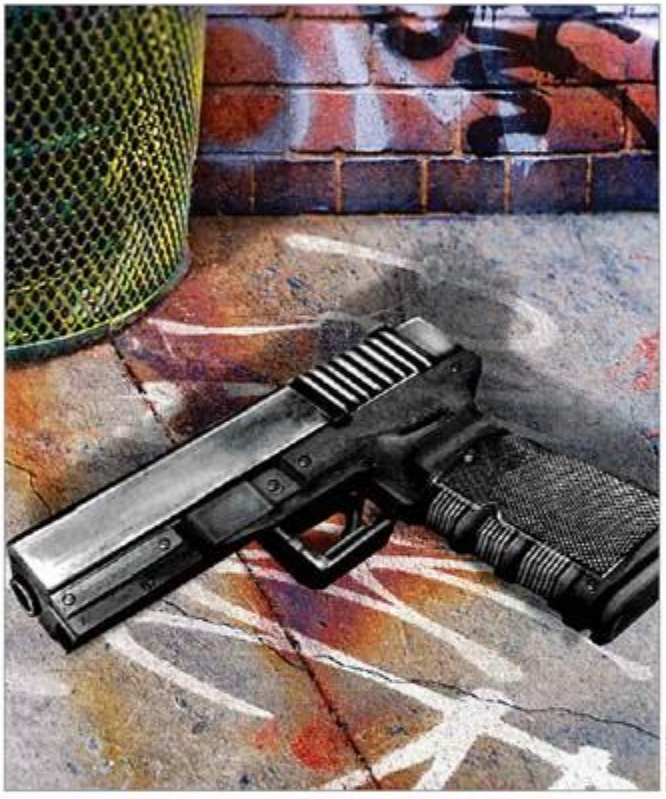
Thanks for sharing. Whatever happened to taking your kid to a ball game?

All reasonable questions—from fashion, food and drink, stereos and sports cars to dating dilemmas, taste and etiquette—will be personally answered if the writer includes a self-addressed, stamped envelope. The most interesting, pertinent questions will be presented in these pages each month. Write the Playboy Advisor, 730 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10019, or send e-mail by visiting our website at playboyadvisor.com. The Advisor's latest book, Dear Playboy Advisor, is available at bookstores, by phoning 800-423-9494 or online at playboystore.com.

ASSISTED HOMICIDE IN OAKLAND

PEOPLE IN POOR URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS ARE FED UP WITH THE WILD-WEST SHOW THAT TAKES PLACE ON THEIR STREETS

BY ISHMAEL REED



Some gallows humor making the rounds in Oakland contends that one way to reduce the city's murder rate would be to offer free shooting instruction. Maybe the instructor would be a suburban high-school sharpshooter, one of those white kids who can hit a target at 1,000 feet. That way, innocent bystanders—some of whom have been the brightest of Oakland's young people—would be spared.

Certainly the dealers who shot up my block one afternoon last December could have used firearms guidance. They shot into my neighbors' homes and cars but wounded only one of the people they were targeting. The police have suggested the shooting was the result of a feud between gangs in the district. I wasn't surprised to read a report issued by Oakland law enforcement that some neighborhoods receive better police service than others. The police claim they don't have the resources to attend to everyone's needs. Yet when a member of the African American elite, Chauncey Wendell Bailey Jr., a journalist for the *Oakland Post*, was murdered, the police raided Your Black Muslim Bakery and rounded up suspects the day after the murder.

A few days later the police got a confession from the alleged killer, a 19-year-old who described himself as a soldier. (He subsequently retracted his statement and now claims the police coerced him to confess.) He said he had murdered Bailey because the journalist was about to expose criminal activities associated with the bakery, which is suspected of participating in kidnappings and homicide. It took the slaying of one of its own for the African American establishment to awaken to the murder epidemic that has plagued Oakland's impoverished neighborhoods for more than a decade. Bailey's funeral was held at St. Benedict's Catholic Church, which was so crowded that at one point I had to step outside to avoid being crushed. Father Jay Matthews compared Bailey to the early Christian martyrs and suggested there would be more martyrs.

The Oakland police came under criticism from some of the mourners and even from Bailey's companion. If the bakery, from which other Oakland members of the Nation of Islam have dissociated themselves, had been under surveillance by Oakland police for months, why weren't the police aware of the conspiracy to murder Bailey?

There have also been tensions between politicians and the police union, which *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist Chip Johnson accused of being more concerned with its members' needs than with the safety of Oakland's citizens. In July the union balked at a plan devised by Mayor Ron Dellums (a former congressman) and the chief of police that would alter the way officers are deployed on the streets. The union appears indifferent to a crime rate that has risen nine percent over the past year. There were 148 homicides in 2006, a 57 percent increase over 2005. With the indifference to our needs from downtown, neighborhoods like mine are on their own. We are marooned—the word given to communities set up by runaway slaves that selected their own kings and queens. As part of my duties as neighborhood block captain, I attended a meeting with the police in the aftermath of the December shooting. Though the two officers with whom we met were hardworking and sincere, they told us in so many words that their hands were tied. As soon as they arrived at a crime scene, they said, drug dealers scattered and they had to be mindful of suspects' civil rights.

Contrary to Christopher Hitchens's assertion that Oakland is "soft on crime" (as he wrote for Slate in August), the crippling of California community services began with Proposition 13, which cut property taxes severely. This proposition wasn't designed by softies but by members of the hard right who found they could influence governance by posting vaguely worded initiatives such as Proposition 209, which ended affirmative action in California.

Some black residents do not have the patience to abide the violence that erupts in Oakland's neighborhoods. Impatient with the inaction of the police, Patrick McCullough, a 50-year-old North Oakland home owner who had been trying to rid his neighborhood of drug dealers, shot a youth after an altercation with the 16-year-old in front of McCullough's home. When I met McCullough, he proudly introduced himself as "the vigilante."

Another shooting incident on my own block last February indicates McCullough is not alone. Two men armed with a shotgun held up a Korean American neighbor. He handed over his wallet but resisted their demand that he yield his car keys. He ran toward the middle of the block, hurt from a gunshot that had grazed his abdomen and finger. His screams attracted the attention of an African American named Chauncey Crosby, a 20-year Marine veteran. Crosby told me he heard the shot while he and his son were changing tires. He saw the neighbor running in a hunched-over position. He asked the man if he was okay. "No, man, I've been shot," he replied. Crosby sent the wounded neighbor into his home and prepared to meet the pursuers with lethal resistance. This is the kind of heroic story that happens every day among the marooned.

Our problems would be less chronic if suburban gun dealers were to quit flooding our neighborhoods with illegal weapons. A local newspaper, the *East Bay Express*, traced a number of illegal weapons used in Oakland crimes to a sporting-goods store in nearby San Leandro. According to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms, Trader Sports is the nation's second-biggest source of guns either acquired or used illegally. In 2005 law enforcement agencies traced 447 of these guns to the store; there were 481 traces in 2004 and 496 in 2003. The guns primarily end up in Richmond, Oakland and San Francisco. The ATF revoked Trader's license to sell firearms, but the store remains open. Trader Sports is suing to have its license restored. Across the bay, voters in San Francisco approved a ban on handguns. A judge overruled them. Although black and Hispanic children have been mowed down in the streets since the introduction of crack in the mid-1980s, it took the martyrdom of white children at Virginia Tech to impel the House in June to pass a modest bill that improves state reporting to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System.

This is not to excuse the youngsters whose illegal actions led to the shoot-out on my block. But to blame the gun trade solely on this group is like blaming drugstore clerks for fen-phen. The high murder rate in Oakland involves black men killing black men, but they receive their supplies and assistance from the outside.

After the murder of Bailey unsettled Oakland's black power elite, the change in this city's attitude toward crime was breathtaking. If the role of a martyr is to lay down his or her life to effect change, then Father Matthews was right: Chauncey Wendell Bailey was a martyr.

THE WHITE TO BEAR ARMS

GUN CONTROL TAKES AIM ONLY AT BLACKS

By Joe Bageant

"I can't see why white people are so scared of blacks with guns," says Byron Crawford, my hip-hop blogger friend in St. Louis. "You white people pack more heat than a fat man's crotch." As a redneck raised in the Blue Ridge Mountain gun culture, I'd never thought of white people as particularly heavily armed. But Crawford isn't wrong. Half of American households have at least one gun. Whites own more guns than they do outdoor grills, most of them for personal protection. And it's a safe bet that all those personal-protection gun owners are not imagining being burgled or molested by Scandinavians.

RICHARD BORGE

Gun-owning blacks have long been the white man's nightmare. General Ulysses S. Grant had barely stubbed out his cigar after the surrender at Appomattox before Southern whites were asking what they were going to do now that blacks were allowed to vote and own guns. So they drafted the South's "black codes," banning blacks from traveling, testifying in court, suing whites and owning guns. Ever since, gun control laws both Northern and Southern have been rooted in race and ethnic fear. (In modern times they have masqueraded as gun-safety legislation: As Crawford puts it, "Nobody, not even that opportunist James Brady, wants his name on a Disarm the Black Bucks bill.")

Still, black codes couldn't trump the Second Amendment. And if white Southerners had any doubts, the 14th Amendment not only eliminated black codes, in 1868, but its sponsors also made clear their intent was to prevent lynching. Damn that Yankee moral superiority. By the early 1900s, though, Southerners found themselves with unlikely allies—those same Yankees. Northern whites were warming up to the notion that maybe certain people shouldn't be allowed guns after all—the millions of immigrants swarming into New York: Jews, Italians, Poles, micks and other alleged job stealers, horse poisoners and diseased prostitutes. In 1911 nervous New York lawmakers managed to pass the Sullivan Law, licensing weapons and making concealment a felony. But the big moment came in the mid-1960s, delivered into every American home via television: race riots in 55 American

cities, including Detroit, Washington, Los Angeles, Chicago and Newark. I can remember my boss at a shoe store at the time saying, "Nothing but goddamn apes. Now they're proving it again." White fear was palpable, and where there is fear there is political hay to be baled. Congress passed the Gun Control Act of 1968, with the fuzzy objective of "eliminating gun violence."

The act was a legislative jackalope that morphed inexplicably with each new tragedy of the era. When the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated with a rifle, the act responded by setting controls on handguns. Then when Robert Kennedy was killed with a handgun, the bill was revised to control rifles and shotguns and signed into law. This congressional clown show drew applause from an emotionally wrought urban public. But the contradictions did not go unnoticed. Reporter Robert Sherrill, for instance, pointed out that "the Gun Control Act of 1968 was passed not to control guns but to control blacks, and inasmuch as a majority of Congress did not want to do the former but were ashamed to show that their goal was the latter, the result was they did neither."

What they did accomplish was to leave us with two enduring national headaches: a proliferation of gun lobbies and a newly pumped-up National Rifle Association. Founded in 1871, the NRA early on became a favorite low-rent call girl for gun manufacturers. But thanks to the race terror of the 1960s, the NRA found itself cloaked in the mantle of sacred protector of the (white) citizens' right to own guns—as if it had ever been at risk. That right was simply a fact of life for the millions of ordinary, sensible people who made up and still make up the NRA membership. Consequently, it took millions of PR dollars for the NRA leadership to convince the corn grower in his duck blind that some big-city slicks, men who had never bought a deer stamp in their life, were determined to confiscate his hunting rifle. Perhaps for the first time in history, average rural Americans knew what one of the Constitution's amendments actually protected.

Almost 40 years after the Gun Control Act of 1968, the antigunners still have the same problem: how to "remove guns from our inner cities" (code for eliminating the Second Amendment rights of blacks) without also diminishing the rights of the now more politicized white gun owners. To make matters worse for gun controllers, personal-defense weapons are effective. Armed citizens defend themselves against criminals—mostly by brandishing a weapon or shooting warning shots—6,850 times each day, or 2.5 million times a year. Only two percent of them (606 last year) shoot a nonperp, and then seldom fatally. The cops, on the other hand, shoot about 1,600 innocent people every year. Self-protection handguns are especially effective in defending women. Of the 200,000 attempted sexual assaults each year, 32,000 result in rape—15 percent. But arm a woman with a gun or a knife and the success rate for attempted rapes drops to just three percent. And what social class of women is most protected by personal-defense weapons? Let's just say they don't live in Scarsdale or Brookline. Then there's that American staple, murder. Blacks are six times more likely to be murdered than whites, yet only 30 percent of black adults own guns, compared with 43 percent of whites. So if there is a problem with black Americans and guns, it may be that they need more of them, which is the nightmare of middle-class urban society, white and black.

TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE FOR GUN CONTROLLERS, PERSONAL-DEFENSE WEAPONS ARE EFFECTIVE.

In recent years Democrats had found a solution to the dilemma: avoiding it. Then along came the Virginia Tech shootings. Politicians with metropolitan constituencies are again forced to deal with firearm phobia. Rudy Giuliani says the solution is to make gun purchasers pass a written test. Hillary Clinton profoundly concludes that we must "keep guns out of the hands of children and criminals and mentally unbalanced persons." Barack Obama wants to "keep guns out of our inner cities" but begs us to remember that "when a gangbanger shoots indiscriminately into a crowd, it's because he feels someone disrespected him."

In the end, though, the "gun culture" is the same as it ever was: ordinary working Americans responsibly exercising a constitutional right. Unless we reach the day when the government forcibly disarms the American public, that isn't likely to change. But then, should that day ever come, we will have a problem a hell of a lot bigger than gun control, won't we?

MARGINALIA

FROM AN EDITORIAL in the *Philadelphia Daily News* by Stu Bykovsky: "Because we have mislaid 9/11, we have endless sideshow squabbles about whether the surge is working, if we are 'safer' now, whether the FBI should listen in on foreign phone calls, whether cops should detain odd-acting 'flying imams,' whether those plotting alleged attacks on Fort Dix or Kennedy airport are serious threats or amateur bumblers.

We bicker over the trees while the forest is ablaze. America's fabric is pulling apart like a cheap sweater. What would sew us back together? Another 9/11 attack. The Golden Gate Bridge. Mount Rushmore. Chicago's Wrigley Field. The Philadelphia subway system. The U.S. is a target-rich environment for Al Qaeda. Is there any doubt they are planning to hit us again? If it is to be, then let it be. It will take another attack on the homeland to quell the chattering of chipmunks and to restore America's righteous rage and singular purpose to prevail."

FROM A DESCRIPTION in a new book by Julia Alvarez of a *quinceañera*, a popular party among Latinos in which a father gives his teenage daughter to a boyfriend as part of a coming-of-age ritual: "I'm watching the next generation be tamed into a narrative my generation fought so hard to change."

FROM A POST at abovethelaw.com, concerning a song—featuring lines such as "The word is out, we're a happening place to be"—created by law firm Nixon Peabody apparently in celebration of *Fortune* magazine's selecting it as a "best place" to work: "On the musical merits, the song itself is just as horrific as the idea of a law-firm theme song. It includes such lyrics as 'Everyone's a winner at Nixon Peabody' (the chorus) and 'It's all about the team, it's all about respect,/ It all revolves around integri-tee.' But we're warning you: Even though the Nixon Peabody anthem is dreadful, it's as catchy as HPV. If that 'everyone's a winner' chorus gets stuck in your head for the rest of today, don't blame us."

FROM AN ARTICLE in *Technology Review*, reflecting on the 10-year anniversary of the Deep Blue computer's chess victory

(continued on page 63)

READER RESPONSE

PLAYBOY INDONESIA

Having read about PLAYBOY Indonesia's problems ("Playboy of the Muslim World," September), I thought your readers might appreciate a lighter side of the story. Last year a popular joke going around Jakarta was that PLAYBOY Indonesia should indeed have been prosecuted—for brand fraud. You see, the Indonesian version of PLAYBOY is seen here as being de-eroticized. Scintillatingly sexual material—never mind the real thing—is already freely available, making many wonder how PLAYBOY would compete. Given these facts, what was all the fuss about? Branding and American power. The thuggish Islamists were simply reacting emotionally to a powerful global icon that is more symbolic of America and the sexual revolution than Coca-Cola, Nike or MTV. How do we know this? Because the local versions of *FHM, ME, Popular* and even *Vogue* and *Cosmopolitan* are visually steamier and also have torrid sex-advice columns. Americans would be amazed to see how much skin and sex talk are tolerated in other magazines, none of which has attracted the rage of the Islamic Defenders Front. In essence it is protesting

These images incite fundamentalist fury.

the ability Indonesian men have gained through PLAYBOY to read about the latest Ferraris and what intellectuals have to say about freedom of expression.

Jonathan Zilberg
Jakarta, Indonesia

LAND GRAB

In "This Land Is Our Land" (September) the statistics about changes in the size of farms and the number of farmers are a bit conservative. The size of holdings in Iowa has tripled, while the number of farmers is down by one quarter. In 1955 there were three farmers in each section of land (a section is 640 acres); now it is about one farmer for every four sections. Many old farmhouses have been removed to allow the area to be planted with corn. At one time, each farm grew several types of crops and stock; now it is only corn or soybeans.

Glenn Pollock
Omaha, Nebraska

Land reform elicits strong responses.

Stealing land and farms at gunpoint, as was done in China, the former USSR and now Venezuela, is quite different from buying farms from small farmers. On top of that, U.S. farms feed the world.

Zon Stine
Atlanta, Georgia

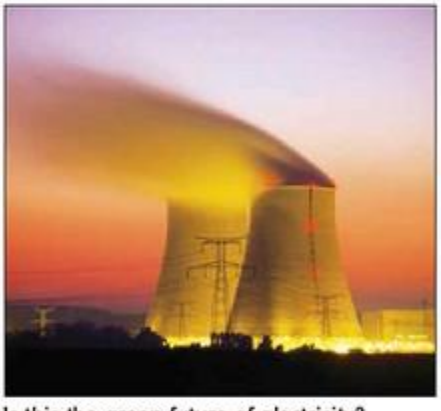
WENT DOWN TO THE LEVEE

I wish to add one last thing to the debate about Frederick Barthelme's "Help Wanted" (June). New Orleans is finished, done, gone, and we'd all better get used to it. Rather than seek healing, we should take off our rose-tinted glasses and ask how we ever let anyone live there, 20 feet below sea level, thumbing their collective noses at mother nature. I lost my house in a 2003 flood caused by Hurricane Isabel, which devastated Maryland's Chesapeake Bay waterfront. My insurance paid, but it was capped at $250,000. We were required to build new houses above the floodplain so it wouldn't happen again (that is, so taxpayers wouldn't have to bail us out again). We weren't given building permits to rebuild at the same level, as the city of New Orleans has allowed. We didn't get extra federal money beyond the existing insurance, though FEMA did offer us a trailer. I visited New Orleans before Katrina and took a sightseeing ride down the river. We were looking over the levees at rooftops, and I wondered at the time who in their right mind would live there just waiting for a disaster. What's wrong with this country is that the people who can make a difference—politicians, planners, builders, developers—don't do what's right for all the people; they just do what is right for themselves and their narrow interests. Wouldn't it be nice to have some sensible, pragmatic leaders who do the right thing occasionally?

Peter Thornton
Annapolis, Maryland

ATOMIC

You are right on the money with your nuclear-power article in the July issue ("Greens for Nukes"). I would like to add some insight as to how nuclear power can be a catalyst for energy change at the gas pump. Nuclear-generated electricity gives us wide latitude to do things we can't do with other energy sources. This relatively cheap electricity permits us to derive hydrogen and oxygen from seawater, which is impractical with other energy sources. Once we have hydrogen, a wide world of energy independence opens to us. Without dramatically changing our automobile engines, we can produce low-emission motor fuels. Hydrogen can be reacted with the global-warming gas CO_2 to produce methane, which can be used as a very low-pollution motor fuel, as well as an interim fuel source for decades. Nuclear power will eliminate the inefficient conversion of food crops into fuel. At one time, the United States set the bench-



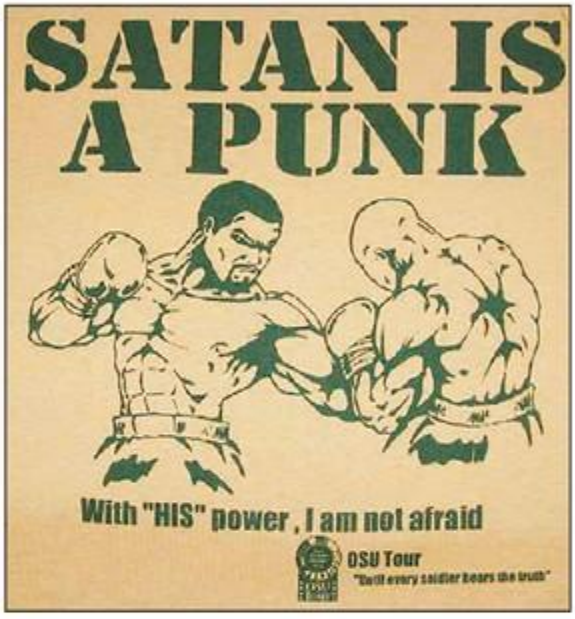
Is this the green future of electricity?

mark for innovation in the world, but now we have become technological cowards. Nuclear power is safe if managed properly. The Navy, for instance, has never had problems with its reactors.

Tom Kesolits
Tom's River, NJ

E-mail via the web at letters.playboy.com. Or write: 730 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10019.

NEWSFRONT



Apocalypse Now?

WASHINGTON, D.C.—An evangelical entertainment group called Operation Straight Up is working with an official arm of the Defense Department's America Supports You program, on what OSU describes as a "crusade in Iraq." It is distributing Bibles and copies of a video game based on the Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins *Left Behind* books as part of its care packages. "The Constitution has been assaulted and brutalized," says Mikey Weinstein, a Ronald Reagan–era White House counsel and ex–Air Force judge advocate general who runs the Military Religious Freedom Foundation. "Thanks to the influence of extreme Christian fundamentalism, the wall separating church and state is nothing but smoke and debris. And OSU is the IED that exploded the wall separating church and state in the Pentagon and throughout our military."

Bubble Boy

WASHINGTON, D.C.—After a lawsuit between the federal government and two peaceful protesters was settled, White House spokesman Blair Jones said, "The parties understand that this settlement is a compromise of disputed claims to avoid the expenses and risks of litigation and is not an admission of fault, liability or wrongful conduct." The problem with this characterization? The protesters, Jeff and Nicole Rank, had been removed from a public, taxpayer-funded Fourth of July event at which the president was speaking, because they were wearing anti-Bush T-shirts. The couple made no disruptions, the shirts contained no vulgar language, and the event was held on the West Virginia statehouse grounds. Yet, at the behest of the White House event staff, the two were handcuffed, fingerprinted, charged with trespassing and detained in jail for several hours. As a result Nicole Rank was temporarily suspended from her job. One particularly eye-opening document came out of the legal proceedings: A heavily redacted version of the *Presidential Advance Manual,* dated October 2002, was made public, revealing how the White House manicures its audiences. Most surprising is how much importance the manual puts not on hiding protesters from the media but on shielding the president from protesters.

Bad Company

HARARE, ZIMBABWE—President Robert Mugabe approved a new law permitting domestic surveillance. The change allows the intelligence services to listen in on telephone conversations and look at mail and e-mail. Mugabe's government says the measure is for security; critics say the law will be used to stifle opposition.

Bad Company, Part Two

KAMPALA, UGANDA—In the run-up to November's Commonwealth Summit here, antigay activists are on the march. They feel the government is under pressure to relax its antigay laws to appease other member countries; homosexuality is currently punishable by up to a life term in prison. Pastor Martin Sempa, a spokesman for the Interfaith Rainbow Coalition Against Homosexuality, said other Commonwealth countries were trying to "shame, force, coerce, intimidate Uganda into changing our laws." His message: "We are telling them Africans find homosexuality reprehensible. Leave us alone."

The New Diplomacy

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Former Middle East diplomat and State Department employee Patrick Syring retired when his alleged comments to James Zogby, president of the Arab American Institute, came to light. "The only good Arab is a dead Arab," Syring reportedly said on a voice mail recorded at the institute in July 2006. The same day, he sent an e-mail to Zogby that read, "Fuck the Arabs and fuck James Zogby and his wicked Hizbollah brothers. They will burn in hellfire on this earth and in the hereafter." Syring was indicted and pleaded not guilty.

MARGINALIA

(continued from page 61)

over world champion Garry Kasparov: "Silicon machines can now play chess better than any protein machines can. Big deal. This calm and reasonable reaction, however, is hard for most people to sustain. They don't like the idea that their brains are protein machines. When Deep Blue beat Kasparov in 1997, many commentators were tempted to insist that its brute-force search methods were entirely unlike the exploratory processes that Kasparov used when he conjured up his chess moves. But that is simply not so. Kasparov's brain is made of organic materials and has an architecture notably unlike that of Deep Blue, but it is still, so far as we know, a massively parallel search engine that has an outstanding array of heuristic pruning techniques that keep it from wasting time on unlikely branches."

FROM A QUOTE by Lyndon Johnson, during the 1964 campaign, upon learning that Walter Jenkins, his top staffer, who was married and had six children, had been arrested for soliciting sex in the men's room of a Washington, D.C. YMCA, included in a new book called *Anything for a Vote,* a compendium of "dirty tricks, cheap shots and October surprises" in presidential campaigns: "I couldn't have been more shocked about Walter Jenkins than if I'd heard that Lady Bird had killed the pope."

FROM THE BOOK *Murder in Amsterdam,* by Ian Buruma, examining the 2004 slaying of filmmaker and social commentator Theo van Gogh by a radical Islamist who, after shooting Van Gogh and then cutting his throat, told a passerby, "Now you know what you people can expect in the future": "The murder of Theo van Gogh was committed by one Dutch convert to a revolutionary war who was probably helped by others. Such revolutionaries in Europe are still few in number. But the murder, like the bomb attacks in Madrid and London, the fatwa against Salman Rushdie and the worldwide Muslim protests against cartoons of the prophet in a Danish newspaper, exposed dangerous fractures that run through all European nations. Islam may soon become the majority religion in countries whose churches have been turned more and more into tourist sites, apartment houses, theaters and places of entertainment. The French scholar Olivier Roy is right: Islam is now a European religion. How Europeans, Muslims as well as non-Muslims, cope with this is the question that will decide our future."

BOMBERS AWAY

WE'RE SET TO SPEND $320 BILLION ON FIGHTERS. BUT BOMBERS CAN DO THE SAME JOB AT A FRACTION OF THE COST

Bombers have been going out of fashion for decades. Military planners have long assumed fighters, which are more accurate because they fly lower, would take over bombing duties. But the precision of smart bombs has increased even as their price has fallen. The result is that up to 80 percent of munitions dropped during the initial phases of our recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq fell from bombers. Despite this, we're still ordering only fighter jets. Why? In some ways *Top Gun*—with its widescreen romanticization of the acrobatic moves and danger of air-to-air combat—dictates our military procurement. Bomber pilots don't do loops or feel g-forces, and bombers fly at altitudes free from ground-based antiaircraft fire. They are lumbering freight aircraft compared with fighter jets. As a result of the long-standing antibomber culture, the former pilots now making decisions on what to buy all either flew fighters or wish they had.

Despite real-world experience in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Pentagon has finalized contracts for new Joint Strike Fighters.

During World War II the U.S. bomber fleet reached 75,000. Today we have 183 and no plans to buy more in the next decade. The long-serving B-52 (right) is now set to stay in use through 2037. Smart bombs mean bombers can deliver munitions as precisely as lower-flying jets and from farther away than shorter-range fighters based on aircraft carriers or at in-theater airstrips. The 2,000-pound JDAM (below right) is so accurate it can provide even close-air support when dropped from high-altitude bombers. Prior to 9/11 Donald Rumsfeld had intended to decommission 30 of the Reagan-era B-1s (below left), but they were needed. With current smart bombs, modified commercial planes could serve as next-generation bombers.

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PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: BILL RICHARDSON

A candid conversation with the Democratic presidential hopeful about all the big issues: war, energy, immigration, abortion and, of course, baseball

For many Americans, Democratic presidential candidate Bill Richardson, the governor of New Mexico, is best known for his role as "undersecretary of state for thugs," as he himself has described it. Richardson—a former congressman, ambassador and secretary of energy—has been tapped by presidents of both parties to face off with some of the most unsavory rulers in the world, including Saddam Hussein and Fidel Castro. Richardson's unique blend of experience has led columnist David Brooks of The New York Times to name him as the Democratic candidate with the most appealing résumé: a sitting governor (in a time when four of the past five presidents have had statehouse experience) who also has foreign- and energy-policy credentials.

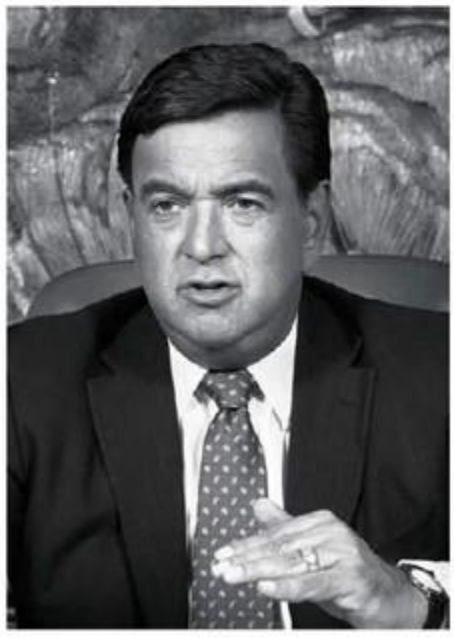
Richardson's run for president began 60 years ago—on the day he was born. His parents lived in Mexico City, where his father was a branch manager for National City Bank of New York. But he sent his Mexican wife to Pasadena, California for the birth of their child. This gave Richardson U.S. citizenship and also ensured that he met the constitutional requirements for the presidency.

Richardson grew up "between worlds"—as the title of his autobiography puts it—shuttling between his privileged upbringing and friends who lived in the barrio in far more modest circumstances. He attended an exclusive boarding school in Massachusetts and then Tufts University, where he was a baseball star and made his first run for office; he was elected president of his fraternity.

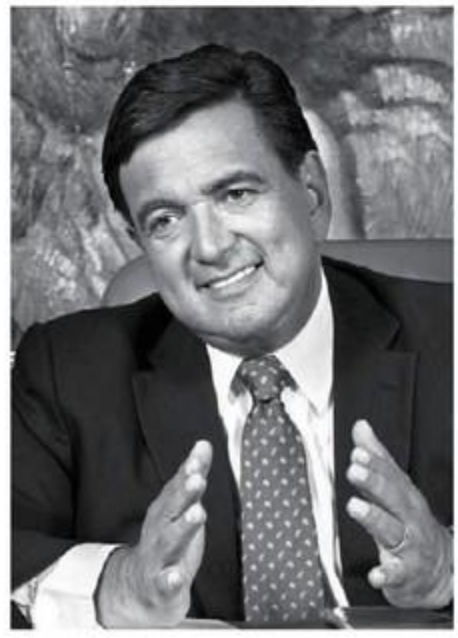
Richardson's appetite for politics was nurtured when he worked as a staff aide in Washington, D.C., and his political ambitions next led him to move to New Mexico, a state where he had never lived, because he saw it as the best place to launch a political career. In 1982 he was elected to Congress. Fourteen years later President Bill Clinton named him U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, where Richardson's one-on-one backslapping political skills made him a favorite with the diplomatic corps. (A longtime member of the ambassadorial staff recently said Richardson would be "a natural" as secretary of state.) He left that post to become secretary of energy, but his reputation took a hit after a blowup over lax security at the Los Alamos nuclear-weapons laboratory. He survived, though, and went on to win his next election, becoming governor of New Mexico in 2002. In 2006 he was reelected with nearly 70 percent of the vote.

As a Democratic presidential hopeful in a crowded pack of candidates, however, Richardson faces daunting obstacles—some of his own making. Compared with front-running contenders Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, he has far less money. He does not look like the modern model of a president; unhappily for his image consultant, he admits to struggling with his weight. His physical style of campaigning has helped spur rumors—none of them accompanied by evidence—that he has a "Clinton problem" with women. In addition, his propensity for spontaneous "seat-of-the-pants" comments (as longtime Washington journalist Robert Novak put it) has brought him grief; he said in a recent debate on Logo, the gay-oriented TV network, that homosexuality is a choice, only to recant his statement the next day.

PLAYBOY *sent CBS News senior political correspondent* **Jeff Greenfield** *to interview Richardson on the campaign trail in Iowa, New Hampshire and New York. "It takes about 30 seconds to see why Richardson has succeeded in politics," Greenfield reports. "With his arm on a voter's shoulder, an easy laugh and an unpretentious style of campaigning—'I'm getting my shtick down,' he says, using a Yiddish term he likely did not learn in New Mexico—Richardson is a natural fit with Iowa, where he is pinning his presidential hopes on a strong showing in that first-in-the-nation caucus state. Even if he does well, he'll need to demonstrate a sense of presidential gravitas to become a serious contender. He must also fight the perception that as a Hispanic governor in the Southwest, where Democrats hope to make*



"I should have pushed harder for diplomacy. At the time, I thought, I don't have all the intelligence; Bush says Saddam has weapons of mass destruction. What happened afterward was massive incompetence and massive deception."



"Yeah, I swear. Yeah, I smoke a cigar occasionally. I make mistakes. The American people should know who I am. I'm overweight. But I'm comfortable with who I am. I don't mope around that I didn't look good on Jay Leno."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK EDWARD HARRIS

"I angered a lot of Hispanic and immigrant groups by being the first governor to declare a border emergency. Right now the border isn't adequately protected. I would extend the tour of the National Guard."

major gains, he could be of more use to his party as a vice-presidential candidate than he would be leading the ticket."

PLAYBOY: First things first. Many pundits have said, and early polls have indicated, that the race for your party's nomination is between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. Can you realistically compete with them?

RICHARDSON: The media expects an instant breakthrough, but it takes time. I started out under the margin of error. I'm at 13 percent. [At the time of this interview] I'm the only one whose polls are going up. I've had huge crowds in New Hampshire and Iowa. I'm in double digits in both states. According to CNN I'm third in New Hampshire. I'm not up with the top two yet, but there are months to go.

PLAYBOY: But how do you compete against the candidates who receive most of the media attention and have by far the most money?

RICHARDSON: You target your efforts and resources in the two most important states in the race, Iowa and New Hampshire. People there aren't swayed by the smarty-pants set in Washington and New York.

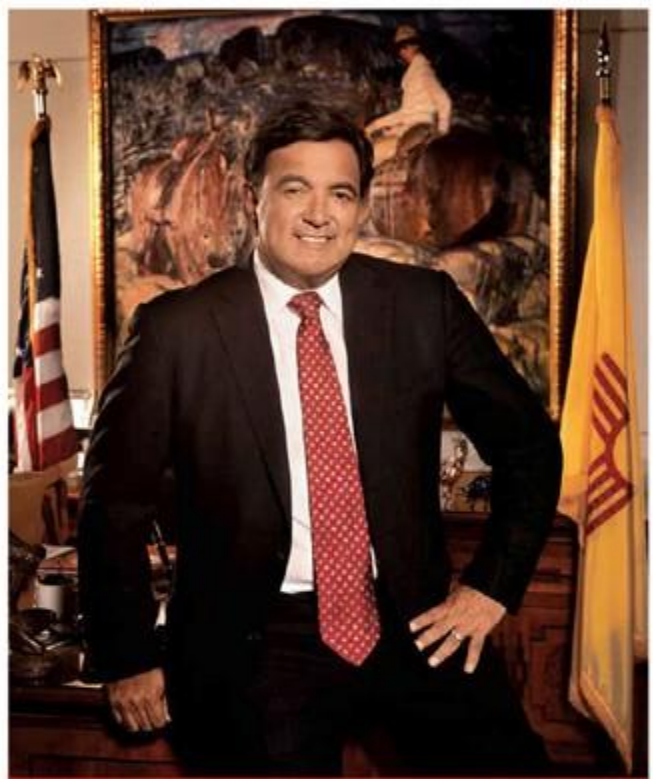
PLAYBOY: Why are you a better choice than Obama or Clinton?

RICHARDSON: This is a race about change. Who can bring change most effectively? I'm the one who can bring about change. I know how to get things done. I have the most foreign- and domestic-policy experience. It's not just about my résumé, either. I've done things to make people's lives better. I have more foreign-policy experience; I'm the only one who has negotiated with a foreign country. All the candidates can talk about voting rights, creating jobs, energy plans, but I've done them. We need to elect candidates who can win in the Southwest, Ohio, Florida and a little bit of the South. I'm the man who can do that. That differentiates me. So my best argument for being president is my experience—I'm ready to be president—and my electability.

PLAYBOY: You have said you won't conduct a negative campaign. To differentiate yourself, however, don't you have to take on the other candidates?

RICHARDSON: I will never go negative. I will never attack them personally. I will, however, emphasize my advantage over senators Clinton and Obama. The so-called front-running candidates arrive, do a structured town meeting with a thousand people in a gym and then leave. I go into living rooms and meet people directly. I stay for three days, go into 10 homes a day, each with 100 people. I connect with people. My message is getting out. My ads are well received. Hell, there was some political writer who predicted I'll win Iowa. Did you see that? You never know.

PLAYBOY: Obama and Clinton have been sparring about their ability to tackle international issues. Clinton criticized Obama for saying he would meet with foreign leaders, including some who are perceived as enemies of the U.S., during his first year in office. In your book you write that there's no one you can't talk to, and you have met with high-level officials in North Korea and with Saddam Hussein, for example. Would you sit down with Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda?



I am strongly pro-choice. I've always been pro-choice, to the consternation of my bishops in New Mexico.

RICHARDSON: You draw a line with an entity like Al Qaeda that professes to want to kill you. You can't talk to them. I might agree to some kind of mediation in a situation of dire national emergency but not otherwise. But yes, Obama and Clinton are fighting over whether or not you should talk to a dictator. Nobody's bothered to ask me, but I've talked to almost all of them.

PLAYBOY: Like Senator Clinton, you supported the invasion of Iraq. You have also said you made a mistake. What exactly would you have us do now?

RICHARDSON: I want all troops out of Iraq. Residual troops, too. The other leading candidates don't. They leave in 25,000 or 50,000.

PLAYBOY: But is it realistic? How do you respond to those who say withdrawal will lead to disaster?

RICHARDSON: Too many people in Washington have been listening to the wrong military and political advisors. That's why we're in this mess. I would shift our priorities. Our obsession with Iraq has cost us the ability to form international coalitions and strategies to deal with international terrorism, nuclear weapons and the like. It may be the greatest cost of the war.

PLAYBOY: Then why did you support the invasion?

RICHARDSON: When we invaded I said I supported the invasion in order to support the troops. At the time, I felt it was the best thing. As I look back, it was a mistake. At the time, however, I was making public statements and wasn't participating in the decision to invade. The president should have gone to the UN and used diplomacy, but I didn't push hard enough. I should have pushed harder for diplomacy. But remember, we were also operating on limited information. At the time, I thought, I don't have all the intelligence; Bush says Saddam has weapons of mass destruction. However, I never bought the Al Qaeda link. So it was a mistake. And what happened afterward was massive incompetence and massive deception.

PLAYBOY: How early did you regret your support of the war?

RICHARDSON: I knew it was a mistake when we were alone and had no international support and the military operation started going haywire. The incompetence began with the disbanding of the Iraqi army. You could tell it was heading for disaster. I could also tell when Bush was reluctant to talk diplomacy with North Korea—in fact, he was reluctant to talk to anybody who disagreed with him.

PLAYBOY: You have proposed an all-Muslim peacekeeping force, but is that realistic? Various factions in Iraq are determined to annihilate one another.

RICHARDSON: I had in mind that Turkey, Jordan and Egypt would be the main all-Muslim peacekeeping force, financed by the Saudis. You would literally have to force—*force*—a reconciliation of Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds.

PLAYBOY: Some experts suggest that's an impossibility. How would you do it?

RICHARDSON: Set up divisions and boundaries. Set up a division of oil revenues. Use the leverage of withdrawal to make it happen. Invite in Iran and Syria to be guarantors.

PLAYBOY: But how likely is it that factious Middle Eastern governments will work together to stabilize Iraq?

RICHARDSON: No country wants a massive civil war in Iraq. Nobody wants thousands of Iraqi refugees. And in addition we're talking about an Iraq that is not exactly helpless. It has had democratic elections and has democratic institutions. It has 330,000 security forces, many of them trained. It has $150 billion in oil reserves.

PLAYBOY: Bush says extremists throughout the region hate us because of our freedom. Do you agree?

RICHARDSON: They hate us for the invasion of Afghanistan. They hate us for challenging their premise as a political and religious entity. They see disrupting our strength in the Middle East and Iraq as a way to gain power. It's all about power. It's all about building a military and political entity that will rival America. They see themselves as a messianic force with military capability to promote the most radical Al Qaeda agenda. I believe it is a fundamental clash for control of the minds of the masses in the Muslim world. It's an attempt by Al Qaeda and messianic religious groups to control land and property and use them in the name of religion.

PLAYBOY: Is it possible to negotiate with people who have that goal?

RICHARDSON: It's a tough one. Congruent interests brought us to the table even with Chairman Mao in China. His basic premise was the reaction of a civilization that was the antithesis of the West. But congruent interests brought us to the table. I don't see that we have congruent interests with Bin Laden. Al Qaeda is a radical movement, and we need a foreign policy that is ready to fight it.

PLAYBOY: President Bush would agree with you. How is your view different?

RICHARDSON: I think you fight it with an international coalition. You fight it with superior intelligence. We have missed the boat on this by focusing on Iraq. We made it worse, in fact, by bringing Al Qaeda elements into Iraq. Instead we should be building international coalitions, writing agreements with Russia that control uranium and plutonium, negotiating with the North Koreans—talking to them directly—so they don't build more nuclear weapons. We need strategies to deal with these transnational movements that adversely affect our interests, whether they are tribal and ethnic warfare, international terrorism or weapons of mass destruction and nuclear terrorism. I would throw global climate change in there, too. I also believe we need to wage war against international poverty.

PLAYBOY: How about closer to home? With his documentary *Sicko*, Michael Moore brought the issue of health care to the forefront. How would you tackle it?

RICHARDSON: I'm for a mandate; everybody shares the costs. Massachusetts is doing it. California is considering it. We're starting in New Mexico. Everybody shares, which reduces the costs for everybody. My goal is universal health care, and I believe we can achieve it. The $2.2 trillion we spend on health care is 17 percent of our GDP, yet we have 47 million uninsured. Canada and other countries are spending eight to 10 percent of their GDP and cover everyone. I don't want to see any new bureaucracy, however. We're strangled with bureaucracy. I want people to have a choice of health care plans.

PLAYBOY: How exactly would you proceed if elected?

RICHARDSON: The first week I'm president I would take on three issues, and we would have to come up with solutions—bipartisan solutions. One is Iraq. We've got to get out. The second is our $9 trillion deficit. Third is Social Security and Medicare.

PLAYBOY: For the latter two, Americans want solutions but don't necessarily want to pay for them.

RICHARDSON: My deficit plan is a constitutional amendment. For health care and Social Security, I would appoint a bipartisan cabinet that includes Democrats, Republicans and independents. I would draw people from outside the Beltway.

PLAYBOY: With health care, however, you want to increase coverage without raising taxes. How would you pay for the plan? The U.S. comptroller general says Medicare will be nonsustainable when the wave of baby boomers retire.

RICHARDSON: The first point I would address is Medicare. Yes, we have a fiscal crisis starting in 2045 with both Medicare and Social Security. We need to finance them. I'd say to the Republicans, "Let's keep politics out of it. Let's take it on, along with reducing the debt and getting out of Iraq."

PLAYBOY: But how exactly would you fix Medicare?

RICHARDSON: I believe we can pay for my health care plan. It's been costed out. About $110 billion in savings would happen with my plan. I would permit negotiations of pharmaceuticals on Medicare. That would lower costs. I would put

Reviewing Richardson's Résumé

The good, the bad and the unstately of Bill's four major political posts

	👍	👎
As congressman from New Mexico, 1983–1997	Artful at foreign relations, he worked in such hot spots as Cuba, North Korea, Sudan and Iraq. He successfully negotiated with Saddam Hussein for two imprisoned Americans to be released. Though he wasn't drafted by the A's (as he once claimed), he thrice won MVP honors in the annual congressional baseball game.	Labeled a carpetbagger, he was born in California and raised in Mexico; he spent his early adult years in Massachusetts and D.C. before moving to New Mexico, where the large Hispanic population made it easier to get elected. After losing his first run for Congress, in 1980, he won two years later in a newly created district.
As U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, 1997–1998	President Clinton tapped Richardson (the first Hispanic to hold the position), and he was the right man for the job. For his diplomacy and human rights concerns, he has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize four times.	In 1997, just as the Monica Lewinsky scandal was brewing, the White House asked him to interview her for a job on his staff at the U.S. mission to the UN in New York. He offered Lewinsky an entry-level position, but she declined.
As secretary of energy, 1998–2001	Realizing terrorism's potential, he worked at securing vulnerable nuclear weapons from the former Soviet Union. He also bolstered private-sector research in Russia to prevent nuclear scientists from having to accept jobs from terrorists.	His tenure was tainted by a scandal involving suspected nuclear spy Wen Ho Lee, who worked in a lab Richardson oversaw. Lee's case was a spectacular mess. He served time in jail, pled guilty to one lesser charge and received an apology from the judge.
As governor of New Mexico, 2003–present	He set a precedent for improved state-funded life insurance for National Guardsmen, banned cockfighting and brokered a deal with Richard Branson to bring space tourism to New Mexico. He also signed a medical marijuana bill into state law, claiming "it was the right thing to do."	He got off to a rocky start when some appointees turned out to have character flaws. Reasons why a few were forced to resign: allegedly embezzling money from a nonprofit, drunk driving in a government vehicle, being married to two women at once, having a prior conviction for voting fraud. —*Rocky Rakovic*

cost controls on insurance companies to cover 85 percent of care. Today we spend $2.2 trillion on health care, yet 31 percent of that goes into overhead, the lack of electronic records and HMO and insurance padding. Shifting that 31 percent to direct care will account for a lot of savings. According to the RAND Corporation, if you create electronic records, you can save about $80 billion in health care, so we'll do that. And a good chunk of the $450 billion we spent on Iraq would go to domestic needs like health care. Those are some of the things I would do. Also, I'd get rid of congressional earmarks, which would save $23 billion a year. Lastly, I'd have a national commission—similar to the base-closure commission—look at the $73 billion in corporate welfare. I think those would be enough savings to pay for my health care plan.

PLAYBOY: How about Social Security?

RICHARDSON: We'll have to look at caps for Social Security. We're going to have to reject what we do now—raid the Social Security trust fund. We'll have to abandon the idea of privatizing, because that's very risky. Another option is linking Social Security to the budget; today it isn't linked. We also need to look at universal pensions and universal 401(k)s.

PLAYBOY: As governor of New Mexico, you have a close-up look at our border with Mexico. How would you control the borders? You have said you don't want a fence. What would you do to stop the flow across the border?

RICHARDSON: I'll first tell you what I did as governor. I proposed doubling the number of border-patrol agents, which is consistent with a 9/11 Commission recommendation. I can easily see 15,000 at the border. Right now it isn't adequately protected. I would extend the tour of the National Guard. Many of us had reservations about using the Guard for this, but it seems to be working; they're deterring the flow. I would also increase the detection equipment at the border. My worst nightmare is nuclear material—uranium, plutonium—being transported by a terrorist across the border. And two years ago I angered a lot of Hispanic and immigrant groups by being the first governor to declare a border emergency. At the time, the border patrol was almost nonexistent in my quarter. There were drugs coming in, violence—the flow was huge. I declared a border emergency, which enabled me as governor to hire local law enforcement. I took state appropriations to pay for law enforcement at the border, which is essentially a federal function. Also, I vetoed legislation that said local law enforcement couldn't cooperate with federal law enforcement agencies.

PLAYBOY: What about global warming? What would you do differently to tackle it?

RICHARDSON: We need a national effort related to energy. We have to make the massive shift to renewable fuels and renewable energy. I was one of the first members of Congress to put ethanol on the table. There's nothing wrong with building an infrastructure of ethanol production in the Midwest that would create jobs and also shift us to a renewable energy source. I want to be more energy efficient when it comes to use, too, for mass transit, appliances, lighting, air-conditioning, washing machines—everything. I will lead a national movement calling for a citizen-action plan for individuals and communities. I have a concept for national service—it's not mandatory but has incentives—that involves cleaning up parks and urban areas and being more energy efficient. I would tell auto companies they have to be at 50 miles a gallon by 2020.

PLAYBOY: Some experts say one way to get to alternative energy is to keep the price of gasoline high, with rebates for low-income people. Would you try this?

RICHARDSON: I think there are better ways to do it. I strongly believe we've got to set some concrete goals with enforceable mandates. My energy plan says we should reduce petroleum use by 50 percent by 2020 and reduce greenhouse-gas emissions by 80 percent by 2040, with mandates and caps. I'm ready to tell the American people they'll need to sacrifice a little bit when it comes to energy efficiency and conservation. I'm going to ask the American people to be a lot more energy conscious. It will mean a few inconveniences here and there, but we don't want our oil supply controlled by OPEC. We need to do this, and I say this: I'm going to ask you to sacrifice a little bit. If Congress passes 35-miles-a-gallon fuel efficiency, that's pathetic. It should be 50. Detroit has the technology, and I don't mind giving Detroit incentives to achieve it.

I can make people's lives better. I love the one-on-one, the handshaking—the living-room politics America seems to have degraded because of television.

PLAYBOY: How would you respond to people who question whether your experience as governor is transferable to the presidency? Is it?

RICHARDSON: Yes. In order to get legislation passed, you have to build coalitions, sometimes unusual ones. In New Mexico we worked together to improve education and cut taxes. I was able to make our economy stronger. If we are to achieve the goals I want to achieve as president, we'll have to build coalitions similar to those in New Mexico, coalitions of citizens and private-interest groups and community groups and 501(c)(3) nonprofits and churches. You need them if you are going to take on, for example, the pharmaceutical companies and other big-interest lobbies, and I'm going to fight them fiercely.

PLAYBOY: You sound as if you relish the fight, and you have said you love politics. What exactly do you love about it?

RICHARDSON: I love the physical side, the intellectual side and the side that touches humanity. It fulfills your sense of achievement. You feel, I can make a difference. I can make people's lives better. I even enjoy the parades. I love the one-on-one, the handshaking—the living-room politics America seems to have degraded because of television and other technologies. It's why I'm committing to an intensive schedule. The more people I meet, the more I can convince: one-on-one politics, looking people in the eye and squeezing their hand, trying to deal with their concerns and give them a sense of hope. When I leave them I want them to think, Maybe this guy can make my life a little better.

PLAYBOY: Where did you get your love of politics?

RICHARDSON: I think it came from when I was growing up in Mexico City. My father was well-off, but most of my friends were kids from a poor barrio. Their zeal to succeed stayed with me. Many didn't have shoes, which made me see that the world is unjust. I was affected by the writings of Bobby Kennedy. He was very clear about where he stood in helping the poor. Also, I had a grandmother who instilled in me very strong Catholic Church values about helping the poor and downtrodden and standing up against injustice. That always stayed with me.

PLAYBOY: During the past several years, you've seen middle-income Americans steadily move away from your party. What happened to the Democratic Party, and can you fix it?

RICHARDSON: We've become the party of the poor instead of the party of the middle class. I believe we have to help the poor, but we forgot about middle-class anxieties. We forgot about job security and pension security and health care and safety nets. We forgot about college tuition. We became so enamored with the politics of redistribution and class warfare that we forgot about the middle class and responsible tax cuts and economic growth and putting money in people's pockets. We forgot about being the party of high tech and space and medicine and a can-do attitude.

PLAYBOY: In 2000 Bush won the white working-class vote by huge majorities. Even in economically good times, people seem to have deserted the Democrats.

RICHARDSON: I think there was a perception that Republicans would

protect voters, and it was a national security issue.

PLAYBOY: Even in 2000, before the 9/11 attacks?

RICHARDSON: In 2000 our party made a tactical mistake. We should have run under the banner of economic prosperity; instead, we ran under a banner of populism. It was totally out of sync with a country that had a balanced budget, a surplus and prosperity. Al Gore got bad advice from a bunch of consultants who were trying to make him into a populist when he was a new-generation Democrat. He should have run on prosperity, on internationalism, on a surplus—"Times are good, and I'm going to continue them." Instead he went into class warfare. But it was not Al. He was harangued into doing it. His instincts were always right. Look at what he's done on global warming. He's proven to be a great national hero.

PLAYBOY: His instincts may have been right in that case, but weren't they wrong when he listened to the people haranguing him? Isn't that his responsibility?

RICHARDSON: Yeah, sure. He had too many consultants. At least eight or nine. I have one. And I don't pay attention to him. [*laughs*]

PLAYBOY: It has been said that when Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, he feared the South would be lost to Democrats for a generation. Has that prediction proved accurate?

RICHARDSON: No, I don't think so. I just think after Johnson we stopped thinking. We stopped being creative. We relied too much on the civil rights days, on the New Deal, on JFK, and we weren't thinking like new-generation Democrats. We were thinking of the politics of spending and redistribution. That's where we lost our way. We didn't adapt to the times, and Republicans then came up with their simple slogans: "We're pro-military, we're against taxes, we're pro-church." We didn't know how to respond. We were flailing away, trying to retain the past.

PLAYBOY: Wasn't Bill Clinton a new Democrat?

RICHARDSON: He's the one who recaptured our sense of what I think a new Democrat is. He brought us back, but then we reverted to populism.

PLAYBOY: Is that bad? Aren't you a populist?

RICHARDSON: I am, but my God, if you have a prosperous president who balances a budget and you repudiate that, it makes no sense.

PLAYBOY: In the past few elections, the most reliable indicator of how an American votes is whether he or she is religiously observant. Two thirds of regular churchgoers voted Republican, whereas two thirds of more casual and nonobservant people voted Democrat. How did that happen?

RICHARDSON: I don't know, but it could be that the Christian right was more effective in organizing and bringing people into its fold. Unfortunately for the average voter, the Republicans painted Democrats as antichurch. It was not a legitimate argument, but it worked. Wedge issues and attack ads worked.

PLAYBOY: Hillary Clinton made a speech some months ago in which she said abortion is a tragedy. She said, in effect, that we need to respect the views of the pro-life community. Do you share the view that Democrats have been too closely identified as pro-choice?

RICHARDSON: No. I am strongly pro-choice. I've always been pro-choice, to the consternation of my bishops in New Mexico. As president I would have a national goal to reduce abortions, and I'd promote strong adoption procedures. I would encourage family planning. But I wouldn't apologize for my position on choice.

PLAYBOY: John Kerry's archbishop threatened to deny him the sacrament of communion because of his views on abortion. Has yours?

RICHARDSON: No. I have a good relationship with my church. In fact, my sense of justice was shaped by my Catholic religion. Not long ago my archbishop convinced me to pursue a larger increase in the minimum wage. He said, "Come on, how can anybody live on $5.15 an hour? Go for the max." We did. A sense of social justice led me to agree with what he said. My advisors were saying, "Do it in stages. Index it." But we went to the full amount and won. So my sense of justice has evolved from my church as well as my grandmother, who was very religious and made me go to church as a child. She made me go to communion every Sunday. She made me go to confession. I consider myself a good Catholic. I go to church as much as I can. But I don't wear religion on my sleeve. I believe you've got to respect individual beliefs.

I resent some elites telling me my position on gun control is wrong, for example. It's a cultural issue in New Mexico and the West, a respect for a way of life.

PLAYBOY: Some critics say Democrats are too close to the elites on both coasts and in Hollywood.

RICHARDSON: We have to broaden our base. Too often we have nominated candidates who may be very strong in New England and Los Angeles and San Francisco but are unelectable in the great in-between. I resent some elites telling me my position on gun control is wrong, for example. It's a cultural issue in New Mexico and the West, a respect for a way of life. Most gun owners are law-abiding. I'm not going to change my position. That's where I may deviate from others in my party, too, the elites on the coasts. I have very common tastes.

PLAYBOY: Tastes such as?

RICHARDSON: I like sports. I'm a regular person. I don't make any pretenses. I like the arts—I like modern art—but I'd rather spend time watching a football game or a baseball game. I go to the opera and leave at intermission. I like to smoke a cigar.

PLAYBOY: In California, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has constructed a smoking tent in a courtyard outside his office. Do you have something similar in New Mexico?

RICHARDSON: No, I don't, but my wife doesn't want me smoking indoors, so there's already a special room outside the governor's mansion where I smoke. I also strongly advocated a smoking ban, by the way.

PLAYBOY: If elected, would you put a smoking tent in the Rose Garden?

RICHARDSON: It would have to be a very unostentatious tent. [*laughs*]

PLAYBOY: If it's a weekend and you're not working or campaigning, what do you do?

RICHARDSON: I spend time with Barbara, my wife. We have a normal breakfast, lunch and dinner. I ride my horse, Sundance. I'll ride for three hours. It's the only time I can be alone with myself. I like the solitude. I also work out for an hour and a half to make up for excessive eating during the campaign. I try to go to a concert or a baseball game. We have a Triple-A baseball team in Albuquerque, the Isotopes. Or I try to go to a fight, sometimes sneaking away to Las Vegas for a boxing match or concert.

PLAYBOY: Do you hit the casinos?

RICHARDSON: No, I'm not a gambler. I'm just not into it.

PLAYBOY: As a baseball fan, what is your view on the controversy over Barry Bonds and the use of performance-enhancing drugs?

RICHARDSON: There's no question Bonds is a great player and should be in the Hall of Fame. But I believe there should be some kind of an asterisk placed alongside his record. It should say, "There is a strong possibility that he used steroids." Nonetheless, he should be honored. My hero growing up was Mickey Mantle. Years later I was shocked when he got up at a press conference when he was going to die and said, "I'm sorry for all the adultery, for causing pain to my wife. I'm sorry for the heavy drinking." Then he said something that was most poignant. "And to all those kids whose autographs I didn't sign, that you sent me, I'm sorry."

PLAYBOY: Tim Russert of *Meet the Press* claims you have said you are a fan of both the Yankees and the Red Sox, suggesting you have tried to pander to New Yorkers and Bostonians. Well?

RICHARDSON: I was asked, "What is your favorite team?" The Red Sox. Another time, the Associated Press asked, "If you weren't running for president, who would you rather be at this moment?" I said, "I would like to be number 7, center field for the New York Yankees, Mickey Mantle." So they asked, "Is he a Yankees fan or a Red Sox fan?" When I was growing up in Mexico City, the Red Sox didn't exist. The Yankees were the universal team. Mickey Mantle was the hero of kids around the world. It was as if the Yankees were America's team. But when I went to New England, to Middlesex and then to Tufts, I became an ardent Red Sox fan.

PLAYBOY: At a time when every aspect of a politician's life is scrutinized, are you concerned about where this could lead for you and your family? If a reporter asked you a question like that, would you ever reply, "That's just none of your business."

RICHARDSON: Certain areas are private and personal, even for a president. But I don't know what those are anymore.

PLAYBOY: Before you threw your hat into the ring, did you and your wife discuss the loss of privacy?

RICHARDSON: We had those talks. We said, "It may get dirty," sure. I'm prepared to undertake the scrutiny. I was confirmed twice, unanimously, by the Senate. I went through FBI checks for security clearances. I've been in 15 campaigns. I was vetted for vice president, and the Kerry people found nothing disqualifying. There are always rumors, but my life is an open book. Do I welcome the scrutiny? Not always, but I have nothing to hide.

PLAYBOY: In the past, you have been asked about the fact that you have no children. Do you worry someone may try to use that against you in the campaign?

RICHARDSON: Somebody once used it against me or once implied it in a race. The explanation is that Barbara and I tried to have children but weren't able to. We tried. We tried in vitro. It's one of our great regrets. If you look at a lot of my career, especially as governor, there's an emphasis on children. I feel I'm responsible for all children.

PLAYBOY: Why didn't you and your wife adopt a child?

RICHARDSON: We were always moving. I was in Congress, commuting back to New Mexico. I went to the UN in 1997; I became secretary of energy a year after that. I went into the private sector, and then two years later I was running for governor. Time passed us by.

PLAYBOY: You invested $100,000, an inheritance from your family, in your first campaign for Congress. Did you and your wife discuss that, too?

RICHARDSON: Yes. I told her, "We have to do it, or we're going to lose," and she said, "Let's go for it. It's our only chance." So we went for broke.

PLAYBOY: Many Americans are cynical about politics and politicians. Were you ever?

RICHARDSON: Politicians have a bad name, but to me politics is a noble business. There are those of us in public service who try to do the right thing. I always have. I've always taken risks. I've always cast tough votes.

PLAYBOY: What are examples of your tough votes?

RICHARDSON: I'm a Democrat and I promoted tax cuts. I helped get rid of cockfighting, though I should have done that earlier. I did these things and never thought about how my actions would play in Iowa or New Hampshire. I supported medical marijuana use after people with cancer came up to me and asked about it. I was persuaded by them. I'm a good listener. I said I would push for it.

PLAYBOY: You pushed to eliminate marijuana use at your fraternity when you were its president. Why?

I supported medical marijuana use after people with cancer came up to me and asked about it. I was persuaded by them. I'm a good listener. I said I would push for it.

RICHARDSON: I thought it was wrong. I was worried the fraternity would be decertified. A dean had warned me that the house was going to be raided. He said, "We see a lot of marijuana wafting out of there." It wasn't a sense of morality; I didn't want the house to be shut down. I had a confrontation with a couple of guys who were smoking. I won the confrontation but was almost ousted. I won even that election—for president of the fraternity—by pushing for things that weren't necessarily popular. I wanted the fraternity to be more relevant. I said we had to participate in charity, we had to learn about the world—to invite the Black Panthers in to talk, for instance. It was the time of Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King and the Vietnam war. I said, "We can't just drink and go to football games." On that platform I narrowly won.

PLAYBOY: And did you inhale?

RICHARDSON: No, I never did. I was really straight. I never tried it. I was a square. I was a baseball jock.

PLAYBOY: David Brooks reported that you prefer the Beach Boys to Janis Joplin. What other music do you listen to?

RICHARDSON: I still love the Beach Boys. I went to see them in Las Vegas a couple of months ago. The drummer said they'd do an event for me. My tastes are eclectic. I love the Eagles, I love the Beach Boys, I love Toby Keith. I named one of my horses after Toby Keith; he's a friend. We probably disagree on most issues, but I like George Strait. He's campaigned for Republicans, but I don't care.

PLAYBOY: Have you always had a secret desire, even a plan, to run for president?

RICHARDSON: I decided I wanted to be president when I came to understand the power I had as a governor to set the agenda. The desire to be president came from a desire to do the right thing—to do what I can for this country. It's not about acquiring power but about doing the right thing, making a difference.

PLAYBOY: Are you discouraged at times? Do you ever think of quitting the race?

RICHARDSON: There are times when it's hard to wake up—I want another 10 minutes of sleep. My first reaction is, My God, I've got to get up because I'm going to be late and I'm going to lose votes. I never think, The hell with all this.

PLAYBOY: Have any of your political advisors cautioned you against colloquialisms like the ones you use in your book? *Holy shit,* for example?

RICHARDSON: [*Laughs*] Yeah, I swear. Yeah, I smoke a cigar occasionally. Yeah, I make mistakes. The American people should know who I am. I'm overweight; I'm trying to lose weight. But I'm comfortable with who I am. I don't mope around at night worrying that I didn't look good on Jay Leno—though I saw myself, and though I've lost 30 pounds I've got to lose more.

PLAYBOY: Bill Clinton was a president who famously loved Big Macs and french fries and struggled with his weight. He also was a governor who liked to spend time with his constituents. Do you try to emulate him? Do you see similarities between you and him?

RICHARDSON: I don't try to imitate him. This has always been my style. But yes, there's a little bit of Bill Clinton in me. One of the things that used to drive me nuts about him, though, was how he would try to convince his enemies he was a good guy. He'd sometimes spend more time talking to his enemies than to his friends. I don't believe I'm like that, but I do believe you try to seek common ground in order to convince somebody.

PLAYBOY: After Clinton, the next two Democratic presidential candidates, Gore and Kerry, were criticized for being elitist and out of touch with the citizenry. Do you agree with the charge?

RICHARDSON: I believe a lot of people were more comfortable with George W. Bush than they were with John Kerry, yes.

PLAYBOY: Did you ever try to talk to Gore

(concluded on page 174)

On the AUTHORITY *of the* SENSES

An UNCOMMON CONVERSATION ABOUT MAN, GOD AND *the Devil*

by NORMAN MAILER

with

MICHAEL LENNON

In the beginning of his new book *On God*, Mailer fleshes out his principal beliefs—his personal religion, if you will, formed by 50 years of observation of the human condition. After abandoning atheism, Mailer says, he recognized that he did believe in God. "The conviction grew that I had a right to believe in the God I could visualize: an imperfect, existential God doing the best He (or She) could manage against all the odds of an existence that not even He, our Creator, entirely controlled. Note the possessive: our Creator. God, as I could visualize such a being, was an Artist, not a lawgiver, a mighty source of creative energy, an embattled moralist, a celestial general engaged in a celestial war, but never a divinity who was All-Good and All-Powerful." The excerpt that follows expands upon man's relationship to God, the devil and sensory perception.

MICHAEL LENNON: You've spoken of the authority of the senses many times, quoting St. Thomas Aquinas or quoting Hemingway. What exactly is this authority based on? What empowers it? If God is your answer, then to complicate the question, can't we say that evil in all cultures has almost always been associated with the flesh and the senses?

NORMAN MAILER: My basic premise proposes that there's a different mixture of God and the Devil in every one of us. Some of that variety creates the shape of our character. You'll hear one person say about another, "He's a good guy, he's stand-up, but he sure can be a son of a bitch." In ourselves and others, we find this constant interplay of good and bad.

If we are going to talk about these matters, I think we would do well to approach them with the confidence that humans have the right to explore anything and everything—at our spiritual peril, but we do have the right. It seems to me—how to put it?—I see no reason for a divinity to put everything into a Book and expect that to be our only guide. He gave us free will. Or She gave us free will. Once again, let's leave gender out of it. If we were given free will, then the Book is the first obstacle to it.

What's the role of the senses?

I would say the senses were given to us by God. If I'm ready to go in for speculations such as these, I would even go so far as to say that mind may have been the contribution of the Devil—or, at least, more so than God. How can I justify such a remark? Animals seem to function extraordinarily well on their instincts and their senses. To a large degree, they have community—ants, bees, all the way up to primates. There is an extraordinary amount of communication we can witness in animals, and they are undeniably superior to us in one manner: They don't go around slaughtering one another in huge numbers. If, by every other mode of moral judgment, we see ourselves as superior, still we know that animals left to themselves are not going to destroy the universe. But we could. So it may be a true question: Did the Devil invent mind? Or is this still God's domain? Or, more likely, does the search for dominance there become the field of battle?

There is no question in my mind that the Devil did enter mind. And, not being the first Creator, did His best to invade the senses as well, to corrupt the senses. But the question is sufficiently complex to assume that the senses are neither wholly God given nor Devil ridden.

But the line you quoted, which has puzzled me for decades, is "Trust the authority of the senses."

St. Thomas Aquinas said that, and Hemingway, in his way: "If it feels good, it is good." I've never read Aquinas in depth, but I was taken with the notion that the most formal of the Catholic philosophers had presented this rule of thumb. What I think it means—leave Aquinas out of it—is that we must trust the authority of the senses because that is the closest contact we have to the Creator; however, it is a most treacherous undertaking. As anyone who's ever enjoyed a drink knows, the authority of the senses on a boozy spree is exceptional. You feel so much, see so much—and that's even more true on marijuana. You trust the authority of the senses until, perhaps, they become so intense that God and the Devil seem to be there working with you full-time. We've all had the experience of an extraordinary trip on drink and/or pot, but what I know is that the end result is as often disaster as happiness. I won't pretend that every time you get drunk beyond measure nothing good will happen. It occurred to me at a certain point in my life that I had never, up to that moment, gone to bed with a woman for the first time without being drunk. Since some of the most important experiences of my life occurred that way, I can hardly wish to argue that drink serves the Devil alone. Given the rigors of modern society, it's possible we'd never get anywhere without liquor or pot.

The other thing you said that gave me pause was how the Devil invades mind. On more than one occasion you have suggested that scientific thinking undercuts metaphoric, intuitive thinking,

DID THE DEVIL INVENT THE MIND?

and I wonder if that is what you see as the invasion of mind by the Devil.

It seems to me our minds work on two disparate systems. One is based on the senses. Metaphor, for example, is almost impossible without being somewhat attuned to nature, to its often subtle shifts of mood. That depends so much on one's senses. But then there is another faculty of mind that can be as cold as the polar cap. Indeed, it is a readiness to repel the senses, distrust them, even calumniate them as powers of distortion. This readiness to free oneself from the senses may be exercised most by the Devil.

Almost everything I dislike in the modern world is super-rational: the corporation, the notion that we can improve upon nature, to tinker with it egregiously, dramatically, extravagantly. Nuclear bombs, as one example, came out of reason. It's not that scientists, filled with an acute sense of their own senses, brought their creative intimations to the atom bomb. On the contrary, it was an abstraction away from the senses, a pure flight of mind that came to the conclusion that it was possible to make the bomb—and then, that it had to be done, not only to defeat Japan but for the furtherance of science itself.

This may be related. I'd like to talk about Thomas's Gospel. In Elaine Pagels's book [Beyond Belief], Thomas's Gospel states that as human beings we all have the obligation to "bring forth what is within." And if we do, it will save us. If you keep in what is in, repress it, whatever it is—it will destroy you.

I used to believe that entirely. I now think it to be generally true but risky. Because what does it mean to bring forth what is within? I work on the notion that there's godliness within us and diabolism as well. So to bring forth what is within you, it is necessary, very often, to send out the worst elements of yourself. Because if they stay within, they can poison you. That is much more complex than saying, "Get it out! Act it out. Be free, man! Liberate yourself." Because very often what comes out is so bad that it injures others, sometimes dreadfully. You could say that every crime of violence is a way of getting the ugliness in oneself out, acting it out, doing it. If, for example, the need to get falling-in-the-gutter drunk thereby intensifies the miseries of everyone in your family, it is doing nothing good for others. Or excessive gambling. Or beating children. Or entering sexual relations with them. To the degree that certain ugly emotions are acted out, others are injured terribly by your freedom to do so. I could argue that it is often a Devil's urge you are expressing.

You have to ask yourself at a given moment, "Who is speaking within me?"

How do you answer that?

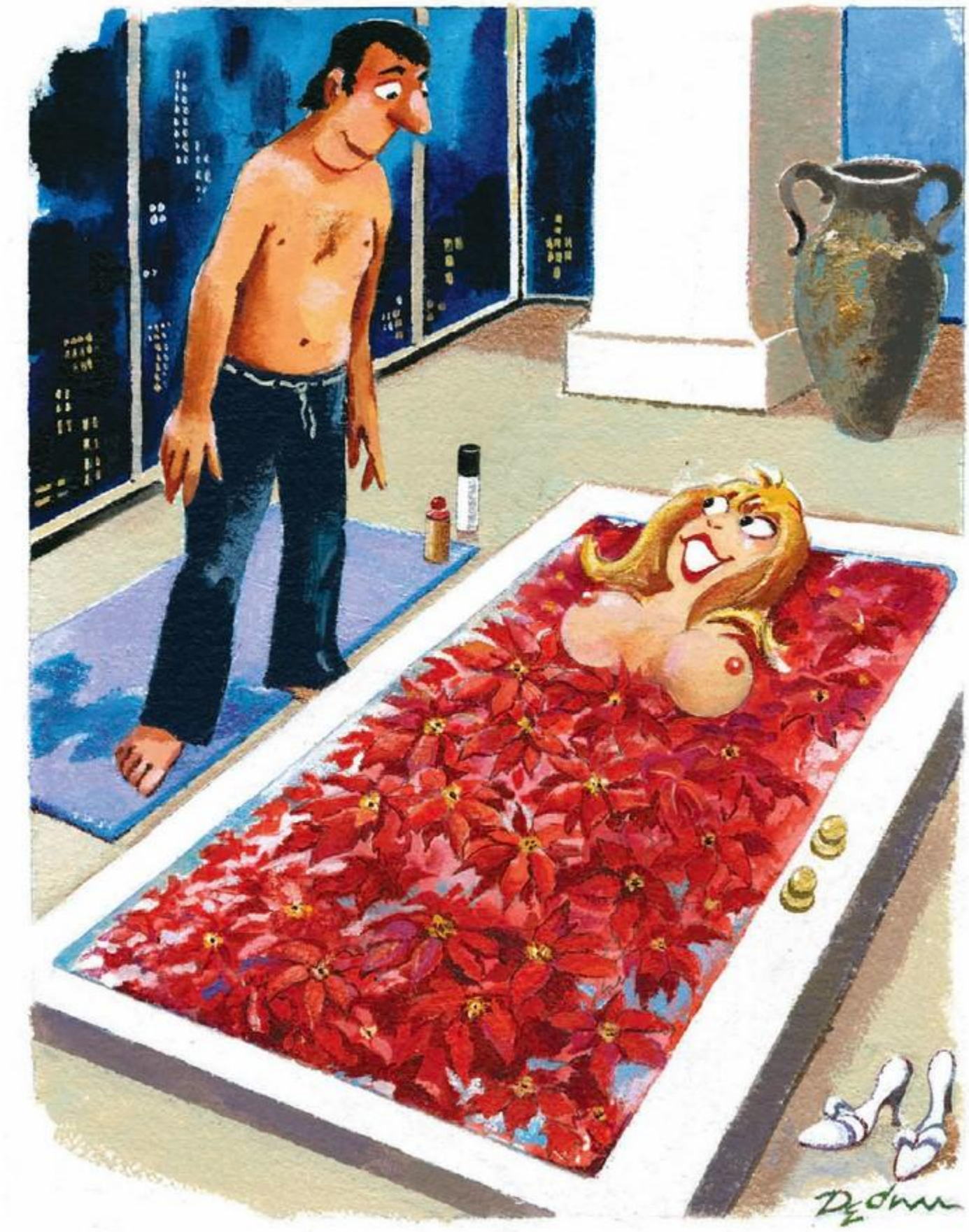
Well, I can give you one story; it's fascinated me for years. At a certain time in my life, I was feeling rocky. My third wife had decided she didn't want to go on with our marriage at a time when I had been hoping, "Maybe this time I can start to build a life." She was a very interesting woman but easily as difficult as myself. So when she broke it up, I didn't know where I was. And I remember one night, wandering around Brooklyn through some semi-slums—not the hard slums but some of the tougher neighborhoods a mile or two out from my house in Brooklyn—not even knowing what I was looking for, but going out, drinking in a bar, sizing up the bar, going to another bar, looking…this is ironic, but in those days, you actually would go to a bar and look for a woman. I think you still can, but it's been so long now since I did it that I can no longer speak with authority. Anyway, I found no woman. I went into an all-night diner—because I realized I was hungry, not only drunk but hungry—and ordered a doughnut and coffee, finished it. Then a voice spoke to me. I think it's one of the very few times I felt God was speaking to me. Now, of course, one can be dead wrong. I go back to Kierkegaard—just when you think you're being saintly, you're being evil; when you think you're being evil, you might be fulfilling or abetting God's will at that point. In any event, this voice spoke to me and said, "Leave without paying."

It was a minor sum—25 cents for coffee and a doughnut in those days. I was aghast because I'd been brought up properly. One thing you didn't do was steal. And never from strangers! How awful! I said, "I can't do it." And the voice—it was most amused—said, "Go ahead and do it," quietly, firmly, laughing at me. So I got up, slipped out of the restaurant and didn't pay the quarter. And I thought about this endlessly. If it was God…as I said, this was the closest I ever came to trusting the authority of my senses. My senses told me this was a divine voice, not a diabolical one. It seemed to me that I was so locked into petty injunctions on how to behave, that on the one hand I wanted to be a wild man, yet I couldn't even steal a cup of coffee. To this day, I think it was God's amusement to say, "You little prig. Just walk out of there. Don't pay for the coffee. They'll survive, and this'll be good for you."

Now, I've thought about this often because it's a perfect example of how difficult it is for us to know at a given moment whether we're near to God or to Satan, which is why Fundamentalists can drive you up the wall—their sense of certainty is the most misleading element in their lives. It demands, intellectually speaking, spiritually speaking, that one must remain at a fixed level of mediocrity.

You know, this always stops me. I try to think how you would translate your metaphysics, your cosmology, into an ethical system. It's not just the Fundamentalists. Most religious systems say, "Okay, we have the theology, now let us show you how that translates into ethics." But what you tell me over and over again is "We can't be sure." It would be very difficult to construct an ethical system by which to live one's life based on your scheme of beliefs. Have you thought of that?

I accept your point. I do search for an ethic I can believe in. And that is where I go back to trusting the authority of my senses. They can also be—what's the word I'm looking for?—traduced. To the degree that the Devil may affect our senses, they can become a perfect place for Him to get to us. That would be the Devil's aim exactly—to *(continued on page 168)*



"Poinsettias!"

CROATIAN CUTIE

Leona Rajačić reveals the charm of old Dubrovnik

The faraway city of Dubrovnik, on Croatia's southern Adriatic coast, is home to a lively tourist scene, a bustling port and plenty of exotic beauties. Meet Leona Rajačić, Croatian PLAYBOY's August 2006 Playmate, posing nude near an old wharf. She just turned 21. What a way to celebrate.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LUPINO

They say confession is good for the soul. Turns out it all depends on who's listening

MUTE

by Stephen King

There were three confession booths. The light over the door of the middle one was on. No one was waiting. The church was empty. Colored light came in through the windows and made squares on the central aisle. Monette thought about leaving and didn't. Instead he walked to the booth that was open for business and went inside. When he closed the door and sat down, the little slider on his right opened. In front of him, tacked to the wall with a blue pushpin, was a file card. Typed on it was FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALLEN SHORT OF GOD'S GLORY. It had been a long time, but Monette didn't think that was standard equipment. He didn't even think it was Baltimore Catechism.

From the other side of the mesh screen, the priest spoke. "How you doing, my son?"

Monette didn't think that was standard, either. But it was all right. Just the same, he couldn't reply at first. Not a word. And that was sort of funny, considering what he had to say.

"Son? Cat got your tongue?"

Still nothing. The words were there, but they were all blocked up. Absurd or not, Monette had a sudden image of a clogged toilet.

The blur beyond the screen shifted. "Been a while?"

"Yes," Monette said. It was something.

"Want me to give you a hint?"

"No, I remember. Bless me, Father, for I have sinned."

"Uh-huh, and how long has it been since your last confession?"

"I don't remember. A long time. Not since I was a kid."

"Well, take it easy—it's like riding a bike."

But for a moment he could still say nothing. He looked at the typed message on the pushpin and his throat worked. His hands were kneading themselves, tighter and tighter, until they made a big fist that was rocking back and forth between his thighs.

"Son? The day is rolling by, and I have company coming for lunch. Actually, my company is *bringing* lu——"

"Father, I may have committed a terrible sin."

Now the priest was silent for a while. *Mute,* Monette thought. There was a white word if there ever was one. Type it on a file card and it ought to disappear.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES IMBROGNO

MUTE

When the priest on the other side of the screen spoke again, his voice was still friendly but more grave. "What's your sin, my son?"

And Monette said, "I don't know. You'll have to tell me."

— 2 —

It was starting to rain when Monette came up on the northbound entrance ramp to the turnpike. His suitcase was in the trunk, and his sample cases—big boxy things, the kind lawyers tote when they're taking evidence into court—were in the backseat. One was brown, one black. Both were embossed with the Wolfe & Sons logo: a timber wolf with a book in its mouth. Monette was a salesman. He covered all of northern New England. It was Monday morning. It had been a bad weekend, very bad.

He had never picked up a hitchhiker. Today he swerved over at the edge of the ramp and came to a stop. Today he had nothing to lose.

His wife had moved out to a motel, where she was probably not alone. Soon she might go to jail. Certainly there would be a scandal, and infidelity was going to be the least of it.

On the lapel of his jacket, he wore a button reading, ASK ME ABOUT THE BEST FALL LIST EVER!!

There was a man standing at the foot of the ramp. He was wearing old clothes and holding up a sign as Monette approached and the rain grew stronger. There was a battered brown knapsack between feet dressed in dirty sneakers. The Velcro closure of one sneaker had come loose and stuck up like a cockeyed tongue. The hitchhiker had no cap, let alone an umbrella.

At first all Monette could make out of the sign were crudely drawn red lips with a black slash drawn diagonally through them. When he got a little closer, he saw the words above the slashed mouth read I AM MUTE! Below the slashed mouth was this: WILL YOU GIVE ME A RIDE???

Monette put on his blinker to make his turn onto the ramp. The hitchhiker flipped the sign over. On the other side was an ear, just as crudely drawn, with a slash through it. Above the ear: I AM DEAF! Below it: PLEASE MAY I HAVE A RIDE???

Monette had driven millions of miles since he was sixteen, most of them in the dozen years he had been repping for Wolfe & Sons, selling one best fall list ever after another, and during that time he had never picked up a single hitchhiker. Today he swerved over at the edge of the ramp with no hesitation and came to a stop. The St. Christopher's medal looped over the rearview mirror was still swinging back and forth when he used the button on his door to pop open the locks. Today he felt he had nothing to lose.

The hitchhiker slid in and put his battered little pack between his damp and dirty sneakers. Monette had thought, looking at him, that the fellow would smell bad, and he wasn't wrong. He said, "How far you going?"

The hitchhiker shrugged and pointed up the ramp. Then he bent and carefully put his sign on top of his pack. His hair was stringy and thin. There was some gray in it.

"I know which way, but..." Monette realized the man wasn't hearing him. He waited for him to straighten up. A car blew past and up the ramp, honking even though Monette had left him plenty of room to get by. Monette gave him the finger. This he *had* done before, but never for such minor annoyances.

The hitchhiker fastened his seat belt and looked at Monette, as if to ask what the holdup was.

There were lines on his face, and stubble. Monette couldn't even begin to guess his age. Somewhere between old and not old, that was all he knew.

"How far are you going?" Monette asked, this time enunciating each word, and when the guy still only looked at him—average height, skinny, no more than a hundred and fifty pounds—he said, "Can you read lips?" He touched his own.

The hitchhiker shook his head and made some hand gestures.

Monette kept a pad in the console. While he wrote *How far?* on it, another car cruised past, now pulling up a fine rooster tail of moisture. Monette was going all the way to Derry, a hundred and sixty miles, and these were the kind of driving conditions he usually loathed, second only to heavy snow. But today he reckoned it would be all right. Today the weather—and the big rigs, pulling up their secondary storms of flying water as they droned past—would keep him occupied.

Not to mention this guy. His new passenger. Who looked at the note, then back at Monette. It occurred to Monette later that maybe the guy couldn't read, either—learning to read when you're a deaf-mute had to be damn hard—but understood the question mark. The man pointed through the windshield and up the ramp. Then he opened and closed his hands eight times. Or maybe it was ten. Eighty miles. Or a hundred. If he knew at all.

"Waterville?" Monette guessed.

The hitchhiker looked at him blankly.

"Okay," Monette said. "Whatever. Just tap me on the shoulder when we get where you're going."

The hitchhiker looked at him blankly.

"Well, I guess you will," Monette said. "Assuming you've even got a destination in mind, that is." He checked his rearview, then got rolling. "You're pretty much cut off, aren't you?"

The guy was still looking at him. He shrugged and put his palms over his ears.

"I know," Monette said, and merged. "Pretty much cut off. Phone lines down. But today I almost wish I was you and you were me." He paused. "Almost. Mind some music?"

And when the hitchhiker just turned his head away and looked out the window, Monette had to laugh at himself. Debussy, AC/DC or Rush Limbaugh, it was all the same to this guy.

He had bought the new Josh Ritter CD for his daughter—it was her birthday in a week—but hadn't remembered to send it to her yet. Too many other things going on just lately. He set the cruise control once they'd cleared Portland, slit the wrapping with his thumb and stuck the CD in the player. He supposed it was now technically a used CD, not the kind of thing you give your beloved only child. Well, he could always buy her another one. Assuming, that was, he still had money to buy one with.

Josh Ritter turned out to be pretty good. Kind of like early Dylan, only with a better attitude. As he listened, he mused on money. Affording a new CD for Kelsie's birthday was the least of his problems. The fact that what she really wanted—and needed—was a new laptop wasn't very high on the list either. If Barb had done what she said she had done—what the SAD office *confirmed* that she'd done—he didn't know how he was going to afford the kid's last year at Case Western. Even assuming he still had a job himself. *That* was a problem.

He turned the music up to drown the problem out and partially succeeded, but by the time they reached Gardiner, the last chord had died out. The hitchhiker's face and body were turned away to the passenger window. Monette could see only the back of his stained and faded duffle coat, with too-thin hair straggling down over the collar in bunches. It looked like there had been something printed on the back of the coat once, but now it was too faded to make out.

That's the story of this poor schmo's life, Monette thought.

At first Monette couldn't decide if the hitchhiker was dozing or looking at the scenery. Then he noted the slight downward tilt of the man's head and the way his breath was fogging the glass of the passenger window, and decided dozing was more likely. And why not? The only thing more boring than the Maine Turnpike south of Augusta was the Maine Turnpike south of Augusta in a cold spring rain.

Monette had other CDs in the center console, but instead of rummaging through them, he turned off the car's sound system. And after he'd passed through the Gardiner toll station—not stopping, only slowing, the wonders of E-ZPass—he began to talk.

†

He hadn't spoken of her betrayal aloud. Doing so was like singing in the shower. Or vomiting there.

— 3 —

Monette stopped talking and checked his watch. It was quarter to noon, and the priest had said he had company coming for lunch. That the company was bringing lunch, actually.

"Father, I'm sorry this is taking so long. I'd speed it up if I knew how, but I don't."

"That's all right, son. I'm interested now."

"Your company——"

"Will wait while I'm doing the Lord's work. Son, did this man rob you?"

"No," Monette said. "Unless you count my peace of mind. Does that count?"

"Most assuredly. What *did* he do?"

"Nothing. Looked out the window. I thought he was dozing, but later I had reasons to think I was wrong about that."

"What did *you* do?"

"Talked about my wife," Monette said. Then he stopped and considered. "No, I didn't. I *vented* about my wife. I *ranted* about my wife. I *spewed* about my wife. I…you see…." He struggled with it, lips pressed tightly together, looking down at that big twisting fist of hands between his thighs. Finally he burst out, "He was a *deaf-mute,* don't you see? I could say anything and not have to listen to him make an analysis, give an opinion or offer me sage advice. He was *deaf,* he was *mute,* hell, I thought he was probably *asleep,* and I could say any fucking thing I wanted to!"

In the booth with the file card pinned to the wall, Monette winced.

"Sorry, Father."

"What exactly did you say about her?" the priest asked.

"I told him she was fifty-four," Monette said. "That was how I started. Because that was the part…you know, that was the part I just couldn't swallow."

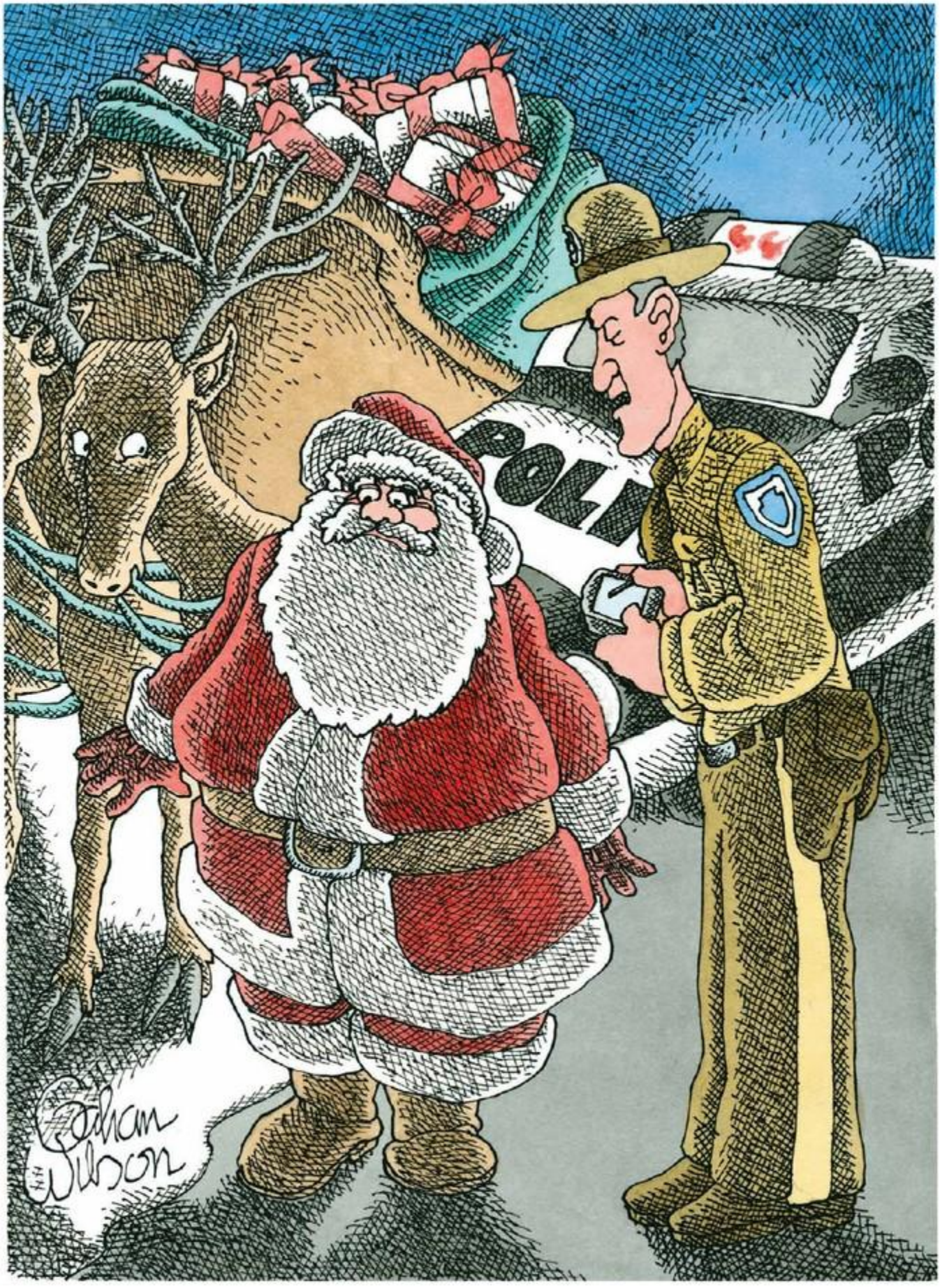
— 4 —

After the Gardiner tolls, the Maine Turnpike becomes a free road again, running through three hundred miles of fuck-all: woods, fields, the occasional house trailer with a satellite dish on the roof and a truck on blocks in the side yard. Except in the summer, it is sparsely traveled. Each car becomes its own little world. It occurred to Monette even then (perhaps it was the St. Christopher's medal swinging from the rearview, a gift from Barb in better, saner days) that it was like being in a rolling confessional. Still, he started slowly, as so many confessors do.

"I'm married," he said. "I'm fifty-five and my wife is fifty-four."

He considered this while the windshield wipers ticked back and forth.

(continued on page 184)



"Just put one foot directly in front of the other, sir, and walk in as straight a line as possible."

SEX *in* CINEMA 2007

HOLLYWOOD'S MOST GIFTED ACTRESSES ARE SHOWING THAT LOVE, PASSION AND SEX MAKE THE WORLD GO ROUND

The culture wars are over. If the fact that the leading candidate for the GOP presidential nomination is pro-choice, pro-gay rights and thrice married doesn't tell you that, then go to the movies. There you will see women—serious award-winning actresses—strutting their sexy stuff with a healthy abandon not seen in Hollywood since the 1970s. Kate Winslet in *Little Children* bares more than her soul as a suburban mom hungry for excitement, Hilary Swank shows the dorsal view of a femme fatale in *The Black Dahlia,* Rachel Weisz flaunts her passion in *The Fountain,* and Lena Headey shows the softer side of Sparta in *300.* Minimal wardrobes showcase the beauty of Scarlett Johansson in *Scoop* (above), Jessica Biel in *I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry* and Jessica Alba in *Good Luck Chuck,* while the lovely Radha Mitchell wears nothing at all in *Feast of Love.* On the small screen, actresses also take big risks. The voluptuous Zuleikha Robinson impresses on *Rome,* and actors of both genders are physically and emotionally naked on *Tell Me You Love Me.* With censoriousness on the wane, audiences are remembering that no special effect is more exciting than the female form.

BY STEPHEN REBELLO

Bottoms Up

Widespread rumors that Jennifer Aniston might finally expose heretofore hidden friends in *The Break-Up* (below) proved highly exaggerated, but even a hazy glimpse of the tush that launched a thousand Schwimmers helped turn the comedy into a hit.

Factory, Flawed and Flawless

It's hard to believe Hollywood could grind the raucous life of 1960s Warhol supernova Edie Sedgwick into a Lifetime-style bio flick, but even while gabbing on the phone in *Factory Girl* (below), Sienna Miller leaves every nerve exposed.

Lohan Behold

Lindsay Lohan plays a pole dancer in *I Know Who Killed Me* (right). It's good somebody does—there weren't many people in the audience to serve as witnesses. Although Lohan looks occupationally overdressed, the landscape in view seems worth exploring.

Henry VIII, I Am, I Am

The Tudors (above) offers cocksman Henry VIII (Jonathan Rhys-Meyers) a flagonful of nubile beauties. Alas, Rhys-Meyers seems more drawn to the camera than to chambermaid Nika McGuigan.

Dutch Treat

Halina Reijn helps the irrepressibly sexy Carice van Houten display the secret weapons that will undermine the Third Reich in director Paul Verhoeven's WWII resistance thriller *Black Book* (above). If American audiences were as cosmopolitan today as they were in the 1960s, the charming Van Houten would be a major star.

Mistress of the Universe

French director Catherine Breillat's films are known for provocative scenes of female sexuality. *The Last Mistress* (above right) is no exception. Asia Argento is on abundant display in the title role.

Sock Puppet

Newlywed Kate Hudson blows a gasket when she discovers Owen Wilson, as a houseguest harder to get rid of than a chocolate stain, pleasuring himself inside a sock in *You, Me and Dupree* (right). In fairness, the sock seems to be enjoying itself too.

The Sex Files

On Showtime's *Californication,* writer David Duchovny enjoys the pleasures of Michele Nordin (above left) and Madeline Zima (right). The show proudly bucks the reality-TV trend, which explains why the writer gets the girls.

Loving the Law

In *Breaking and Entering* (below), Jude Law catches Juliette Binoche's son burglarizing his office. There's your breaking part. Binoche retaliates by taking the Law into her own hands. There's your entering. Then she blackmails him. There's your exiting.

I Spy

Audiences who caught the Taiwanese-made *Help Me Eros* (above) probably zoned out on its story about a guy who feels suicidal after going broke, but they no doubt recall its gymnastic sex scenes. Not feeling so depressed now, are you, sport?

Languid Lady

Playing the once but no longer repressed lady in *Lady Chatterley* (below), the latest screen version of D.H. Lawrence's famously erotic novel, Marina Hands lolls in bed, carefully avoiding the wet spot after a romp with her studly gamesman.

Focus, Man, Focus!
Yes, Nicolas Cage, we know you can see the future in the film *Next* (above). Yes, we know the FBI wants you to help prevent a terrorist nuclear attack. But that's just a flimsy sheet between you and the luscious Jessica Biel. Can't you see that?

Dangerous Curves
The hard-nosed 1940s copper Josh Hartnett plays in *The Black Dahlia* (below) should have known better than to get mixed up with a dangerous dame like Hilary Swank. But then again, his agent should have known better than to get him mixed up in this film.

Vice Is Nice
In *Miami Vice: Unrated—The Director's Cut* (bottom), Colin Farrell, playing the intense vice detective Sonny Crockett, goes deep undercover to bang a Gong (Gong Li, that is), who plays a drug-cartel leader. Hey, whatever duty demands.

Retro Raunch
Sleaze with ease? Class with sass? Rose McGowan's turn as a dancer is one of the best reasons to see the Quentin Tarantino–Robert Rodriguez opus *Grindhouse* (below). Just remember: If she unscrews her leg, you've gone too far.

Exotic Asia

In *Go Go Tales* (above), a screwball comedy from director Abel Ferrara set in a Manhattan strip club, the dances, including one with a rottweiler, are simply astonishing.

Check Your Oil?

By exposing her midriff and spouting a lot of car talk concerning "headers" and "high-rise double-pump carburetors," Megan Fox raises temperatures in *Transformers* (top right).

Grecian Formula

King Leonidas does some very special push-ups with Queen Gorgo in *300* (upper middle left) to help prepare for his upcoming anti-Xerxes exertions.

Weak for Weisz

In the metaphysical head trip *The Fountain* (upper middle right), Hugh Jackman is so powerfully drawn to Rachel Weisz both in and out of the bath that he pursues her over time, space and a confusing story line.

Something for Everyone

"Honey, it's true! I went to the execution, and an orgy broke out!" It's all part of *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (lower middle right), the weird tale of an 18th century peasant whose superhuman sense of smell turns him into a scent snob and a serial killer.

Trailer-Park Party Girl

In *Black Snake Moan* (right), Christina Ricci plays a Southern (*ahem*) debutante who has a fondness for (*ahem*) crewcut lettermen. Said weakness, of course, later causes Samuel L. Jackson to introduce her to his radiator.

Women in Love
Erin Daniels (above left, with dark hair) soaks up the love, and Leisha Hailey (above, far right) seemingly does a comparison test of antiperspirants on *The L Word,* Showtime's sexy lesbian melodrama.

Monstrously Hot
In *Alexander,* Angelina Jolie plays the mother of a megalomaniacal conqueror. In *Beowulf* (above), she plays the mother of a monster. Take heed, boys: Should fortune ever be Angelina-ly generous with you, wear a condom.

One Sexy Mother
Sexy Angie Harmon, playing a dangerously deranged MILF in *The Good Mother* (right), seems to think this really isn't the best time to have her picture taken.

Let Them Eat Cake
Playing the Viennese pastry that conquered France, Kirsten Dunst in *Marie Antoinette* (below left) shows what happens when the wigs come off and the fun begins.

Man of Steel
In *Hollywoodland* (below right), Robin Tunney meets TV's Superman (Ben Affleck). Though faster than a speeding bullet, he's more powerful than a multiple orgasm.

Sopranos? Who Dey?

HBO insists its new series *Tell Me You Love Me* (above), about three couples dealing with their sex lives in therapy sessions, isn't just about sex. Do you think the network is referring to that stuff in between the sex parts?

Kate the Great

Suburbia proves to be a hotbed of desire in *Little Children* (below), in which the curvaceous Kate Winslet discovers the tube steak at Pantry Pride is no match for the neighborly offerings of Patrick Wilson.

Happiness Is a Warm Gun

In *Shoot 'Em Up* (above), Clive Owen plays a man who, like us, is an adept multitasker: He can snuff out assassins while pounding Monica Bellucci into paroxysms of pleasure; we can read e-mail and talk on the phone.

Who Is Stupider?

Kerry Washington, as a wife of the ruthless dictator Idi Amin in *The Last King of Scotland* (below), cannot stop herself from indulging in an exciting but risky encounter with a nitwit doctor played by James McAvoy.

CLASSIC CARTOONS OF CHRISTMAS PAST

A YULE GIFT YOU'LL TREASURE: FIVE CARTOONISTS CARTOONING. JOY TO THE WORLD!

"And to think, Santa, that I didn't believe in you!"

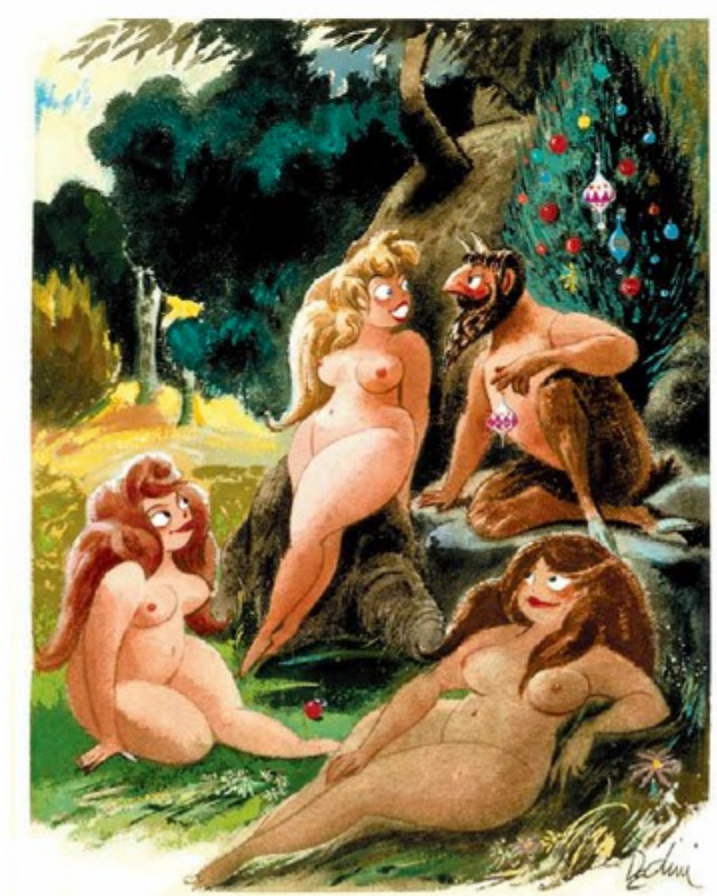
"A candy cane with batteries?"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"Well, the holiday season's upon us!"

"And a bah, humbug to you, too, you old fart!"

"Surprise, Grandmother! We've come to spend the Christmas holidays with you."



"Well, do we exchange the usual gifts?"

INTERCOURSE

You're never more alone than when you're coupling. Pulitzer Prize–winning writer Robert Olen Butler imagines the thoughts of the famous engaged in the act

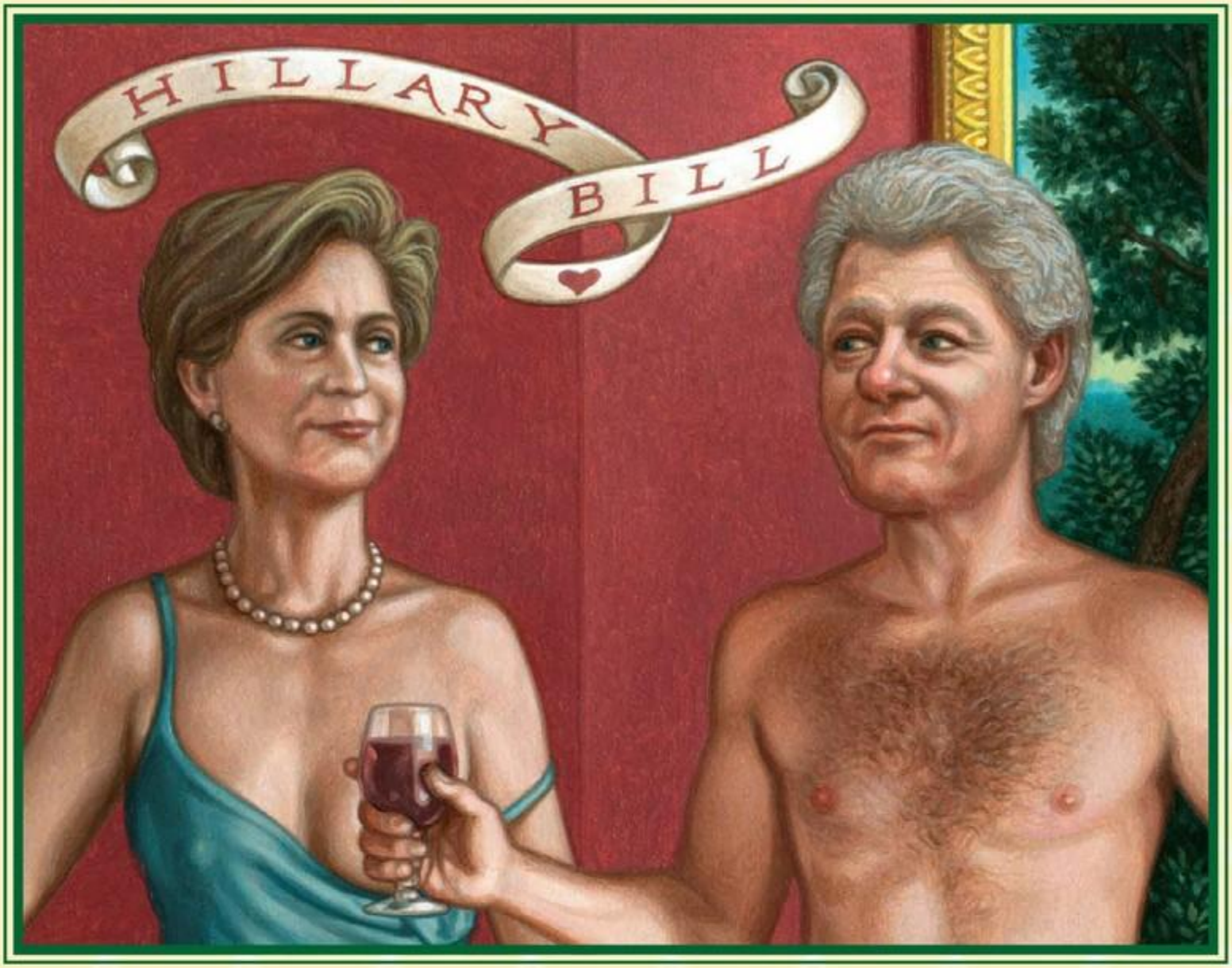
Santa Claus, 471, philanthropist
Ingebirgitta, 826, elf

in a back room of Santa's workshop, North Pole, 2007

Santa: well well well ho ho ho I am a naughty boy no doubt about it, but she understands, my overstuffed Christmas turkey of a Mrs. Claus, with her hair bunned up tight, the color of Stockholm street slush, and I'm happy to put a lump of coal in my own stocking for the sake of this sweet elf's hair unfurled and floating all about us, filling the room, covering us over, the undulant red of the bottom fringe of an auroral curtain *At least she's an older woman* my plump pudding of a Mrs. Claus says, and it's sad really how she can take comfort from that technicality, for this is our 252nd January, my elf and I, and she still looks as young as Barbie, and after my wild night of plunging into chimneys and clothes-drier vents and pussycat doors and keyholes I must—even if only from the sympathetic magic of it—fly through the dark passage of my elf and give her gifts *You need to unwind* my bloated-to-bursting goose of a Mrs. Claus says *I'll just bake some cookies* and I am dashing and dancing and cometing and vixening but my Christmas wish once again is that I could just do this and stop thinking about my wife

Ingebirgitta: he's been in too many human houses: he is so like them now, he is so distracted, he is indeed so like a bowl full of jelly, where has my good Father Christmas gone, before he got this jolly image and before he got his livestock and his fan mail and his 3.5 million Google hits—twice as many as the Easter Bunny, he loves to say—but if only you knew, my dear, how often I think I'd prefer the bunny—though you are a kindly one and you are a merry one and you are a droll one, these are trivial things to me, I am an elf, I am of forest duff and I am of tree-bark dew and I am of quaking top-leaves and I am always of this trembling yearning body and I can dance a man to death, but you are managed now and you are spun and, worst of all, you think too much, and all I really want from you, dear Santa, is a Dirty Decadence 12-Speed Rabbit-Wand Double-Dip Flex-O-Pulse Vibrator.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARCO VENTURA



Hillary Diane Rodham, 23, law student
William Jefferson Clinton, 24, law student

in his second-floor bedroom at a rented beach house in Milford, Connecticut, late spring 1971

Hillary: this had to be done eventually and the personal is political all right and if your underwear and your armpits and your hairdo and your shoes are political then choosing to fuck a specific man in a specific bed on a specific day is political and it's merely political and he's the one all right because everything we talk about makes it clear: McGovern next year and somebody after that and somebody after that and somebody after that and then he and I may choose to fuck in Lincoln's bed or on the eagle on the floor in the Oval Office, and I don't care if that's the next time we do this, to be honest with myself, but I choose this time and I will choose some others in between because one day we'll be fucking on the eagle and there's a soft knock at the door and the secretary knows not to barge in and she says *Madame President, the Soviet premier is on the phone*

Bill: this has to be done at this point, though I miss the surprise, I miss the gasp from a grab of their tits or the dropping of my pants when they least expect it, but there are plenty of others for that, this one's not in her body yet, which is cute enough in spite of her severe qualms, but at least I did get her to shave her legs pretty quick and I can sometimes surprise her into a brief silence with some line of reasoning—McGovern's chances for the nomination or ping-pong as metaphor for Chinese-American relations or some other thing that comes to my lips as quick as kisses—and I did at least rip those red-frame glasses off her face, and Coltrane is playing in my head—*A Love Supreme*—and my lips go itchy and not for Hillary's mouth on mine but for an abandoned ambition, me on the sax forever, though the twinge passes quickly now because Coltrane's power is detached from his own moment-to-moment life, even in the clubs, the ones he's got hold of are out beyond the glare of lights, beyond his direct touch, I was right to let that go, let go of being a surgeon, too, where you exercise your ultimate power only when they don't even know it from the anesthetics, I know the path for me and this girl knows it too, better than anybody else—I can see crowds, great large crowds to wade into and to touch—she's smart and she's tough and I know she won't put up with certain things from me and I don't want to lose her but before she's done here I've got to figure out how to get on top

George W. Bush, president of the United States
Laura Bush, first lady

in the master bedroom of the White House, March 2004

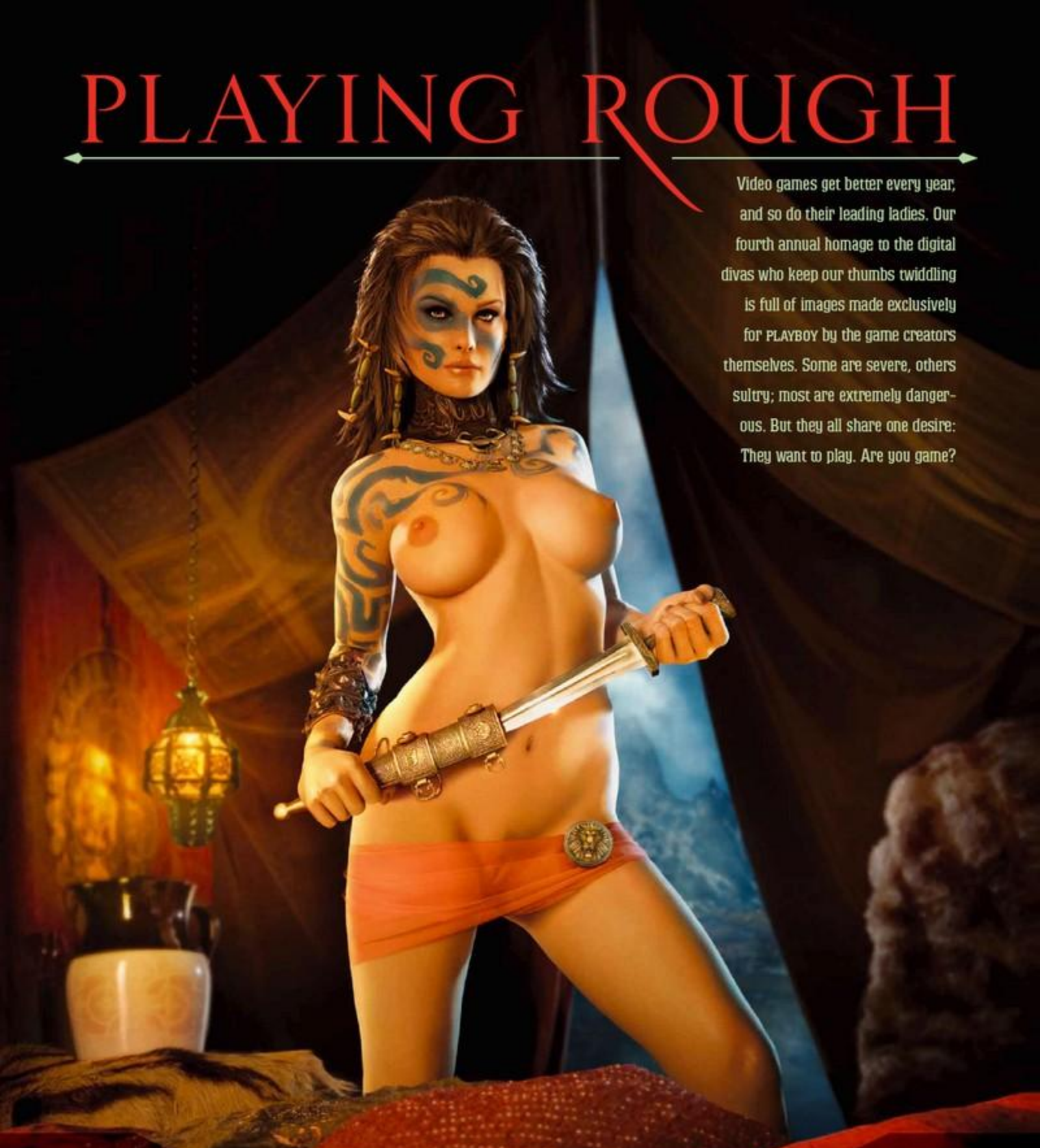
Laura: the Nancy Reagan wallpaper here is very nice, actually—all the peacocks and roosters and bluebirds hand-painted on Chinese paper—she was a good strong Republican woman—is that my cell phone?—no, just a ringing in my ears—I'll have to hold my nostrils and blow when I get a chance, which won't be long—wallpaper, wallpaper—I'm not sure about the wallpaper design in the Lincoln Bedroom, but that pallid lemon stuff will go and also the carpet, with those flowers so pale they look dead—a diamond-grid English Wilton's the thing for the floor, bold Victorian greens and purples and yellows like the sunlight—and a new mattress for the bed, though I better not let Mother Bush know or she'll have one of her conniptions, since it was she who finally replaced the horsehair, but her mattress is lumpy and always was—everybody says so, including Jeb—and it has to go—and I guess I'll leave the Lincoln Bathroom alone for now, it has a quaint 1950s air about it and it'll make George happy to keep it the same—he does have his own sense of history, with his project of peeing in all 35 of the White House bathrooms and he wants them to be just like they've always been

George: so I should have said to Pretty Boy from the National Public Radio today that I meant what I said when I said *the tar on wearer* instead of *the war on terror* cause I had on my new boots down in Crawford, see, and the county was resurfacing Mill Road and I got tar on those boots, walking along, so I said what I meant and I meant what I said: I regret the necessity to have tar on the wearer but you got to walk on the road to get someplace in Iraq cause over there they die with their boots on, I should have said that and Pretty Boy would've just scratched his pointy head and I'd've given him my special little knowing smile which I have given to plenty of these pencilheads and they don't even have a clue what that smile means, which is when I'm out of office I'll have each of you that got that smile down to Crawford, one at a time, and you think it's to get a story about the doofus back on his ranch, but when you get there, I'll make you a proposition, each one of you, which is: admit it, you've dreamed about punching me in the nose, you figure I ain't so tough without my presidential war powers and you figure I'm plenty stupid and you'd like to whip my ass, well now's your chance, just real private, we'll go out to the clearing by Rainey Creek and take off our jackets and we will have it out like real men and I will kick your ass unremittlessly till you're crying for your white-haired little old mama even though she slapped you around pretty good when you were a boy cause that's who you're dealing with. Not the mama. The guy who can whip your ass. *(continued on page 166)*

"Where's Santa when I need him...?"

PLAYING ROUGH

Video games get better every year, and so do their leading ladies. Our fourth annual homage to the digital divas who keep our thumbs twiddling is full of images made exclusively for PLAYBOY by the game creators themselves. Some are severe, others sultry; most are extremely dangerous. But they all share one desire: They want to play. Are you game?



Keaira « *Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures* (PC)

↑ Captured by an enemy tribe at a young age, Keaira was rescued by Conan himself before he became king. Now the head of an underground spy network, she is the eyes and ears of the Cimmerian ruler. Her dexterity and cunning are matched only by her appetite in the bedroom. Too bad for her lovers that a tryst with Keaira is a death sentence, carried out mere moments after the poor sap reaches for his pipe. Dead men, you see, are famous for their discretion. At least they get to taste heaven before they die.

Yoko Retomoto « *Kane & Lynch* (360, PC, PS3)

→ Though things would eventually sour between them, the relationship between Yoko and Kane during their salad days brimmed with decadence and the raw musk of power. Their coke- and champagne-fueled "meetings" in her office above Mizuki (her club) featured automatic weapons and piles of cash to pay the thugs who watched the door while they got down to business, often for hours at a time. Her crime-boss father didn't approve, but he's as scared of Kane as he is of his headstrong daughter's wild side.

Church and Black « *Clive Barker's Jericho* (360, PC, PS3)

↑ **Even paranormal black-ops commandos need to relax between missions. Wilhemina Church (left) and Abigail Black of Jericho Squad are about to enjoy each other's company. The results will be spectacular. Church is a blood mage, equally at home with machine gun and samurai sword, and carves sigils into her flesh to accomplish magical maneuvers. Grim loner Black is a telekinetic sniper who can control the path of her bullets with her mind. That includes the one at her fingertips. We have a feeling it won't be there for long.**

Morenn « *The Witcher* (PC)

↑ **One of the fabled dryads of Brokilyon forest, Morenn is part of the Eeriewives, a females-only society. Extremely intelligent and aggressively flirtatious, they are known to kidnap human girls to raise as their own and to use their prisoners of war for breeding stock. As their lands have been encroached upon by nearby kingdoms, Eeriewives have become more militant in protecting their woods, and those who seek them out often receive a silent arrow to the neck for their trouble. Dryads don't give warning shots.**

A'Kanna « *Conan* (360, PS3)

↑ **Raised among the powerful sorcerers of Parad Isle, A'Kanna was orphaned as a young girl and brought up by her uncle, the isle's leader. Though she could have chosen the life of a princess, she rejected it for the restless wanderlust of a warrior. Now, bent on taking revenge on the evil sorcerer Graven—whose hideous plagues felled her parents—she plies the seas as captain of the fearsome order of the Steadrom. We see her here in her quarters belowdecks with her only true friend, her legendary longbow.**

Sarah Morrison « *Richard Garriott's Tabula Rasa* (PC)

When the Bane invaded Earth, Sarah was a rebellious 19-year-old attending community college. Now, with her family dead, her home planet overrun and what remains of humanity scattered across the galaxy, Sarah is diesel-fueled and battle-hardened. A veteran of countless clashes with the Bane, she has learned to develop her nascent psychic power through the ancient alien language LOGOS. She dreams of one day fighting in the regiment that retakes Earth. If you're not part of the solution, we recommend you stay the hell out of her way.

SEE MORE OF THIS FEATURE AT PLAYBOY.COM/GAMES.

Playboy's HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

If anyone's going to be jolly around your house, it damn well better be you

For the ultimate scotch aficionado: Ardbeg Double Barrel ($20,000) features two handblown bottles of 1974 single-cask, eight sterling Hamilton & Inches cups and an oak pen from Omas, all in a shotgun case of hand-stitched bridle leather.

PLAYBOY'S BIG-GAME BLOWOUT

Unless you have Jessica Alba underneath your tree, with a big red bow wrapped around her naked body, you'll never find a holiday gift that tops our Ultimate Football Weekend. It starts with a four-night stay at a swanky hotel in the Phoenix area, where you can spend hours in bed with your date practicing two-minute drills and pump fakes. You'll get a pair of tickets to the single greatest party of the year—Playboy's legendary Super Saturday Night—and of course two tickets to Super Bowl XLII the following evening at the University of Phoenix Stadium. We'll also toss in a personalized gift basket and a hand-painted commemorative Playboy football signed by the man himself, Hugh M. Hefner. Only 10 of these pigskin packages are available, and they're going faster than Randy Moss on a post pattern. Price: $20,000. Call 212-261-4988 to order.

▶Ask any trout—Orvis makes the best fly rods and reels in the business. Pair the Helios carbon-fiber rod ($755) with the Battenkill Mid Arbor limited-edition reel ($125).

▲These Dominican-leaf Maker's Mark Bourbon Seasoned Cigars ($45) are a whiskey and a smoke rolled into one. You can personalize the box too.

▶Wear your love on your sleeve with these luscious little twins. Paul Smith's Naked Lady cuff links ($125) are fashioned from stainless steel, with a porcelain center.

●Plasma sets don't get better than Pioneer's 60-inch Elite Kuro Pro-150FD ($7,500), with its phenomenal black levels, integrated digital amp and speakers, and room-light sensor that adjusts to your viewing conditions.

▲Darrel Ralph's Gunhammer Radian knife ($2,250) is a handmade masterpiece of form and function in steel and Picasso marble.

▲ASUS's Lamborghini VX2 laptop ($2,900) is a serious speedster with tons of power under the hood. True to its namesake, it is clad in leather and sports Gallardo Superleggera paint.

▼The true purist scoffs at titanium. The Bobby Jones Grand Slam hickory club set ($4,850) is modeled after the sticks Jones used during his astonishing 1930 season. Now show us what you got.

▼Tecnica's Diablo Magnesium UltraFit boots ($725) with thermo-moldable liners are made for advanced skiers who want to tempt fate on the nastiest steeps.

►Philips Norelco's newer, leaner Arcitec ($250) gracefully conforms to facial contours. Very smooth.

▼Each open-baffle speaker in the Steinway & Sons Model D system ($150,000) is milled from solid aluminum and weighs 384 pounds. The result: amazing stillness and utterly transparent sound.

▼This Rawlings toiletry bag ($85) is made of the same leather as the company's classic baseball mitts. A hit.

▶Yup, it's the Captain America helmet Peter Fonda wore as Wyatt in *Easy Rider* ($75). A replica, actually. Who needs a motorcycle? This baby looks fine by itself.

◀Jack Black's Liquid Magnetism colognes ($65 a bottle) sport bold combinations, like cardamom and cypress. Mix, match, magic.

▲The Jerico Stinger is one of the most popular sticks on the pro billiards tour. Pictured: the limited-edition Stinger SS ($1,125) with lizard-skin case ($995).

◀An icon of one of the world's most relaxed cities, Electra's Amsterdam Classic ($550) is just like the ones you see parked along the canals near the Leidseplein. Its message is clear: You're in no rush and enjoying the ride.

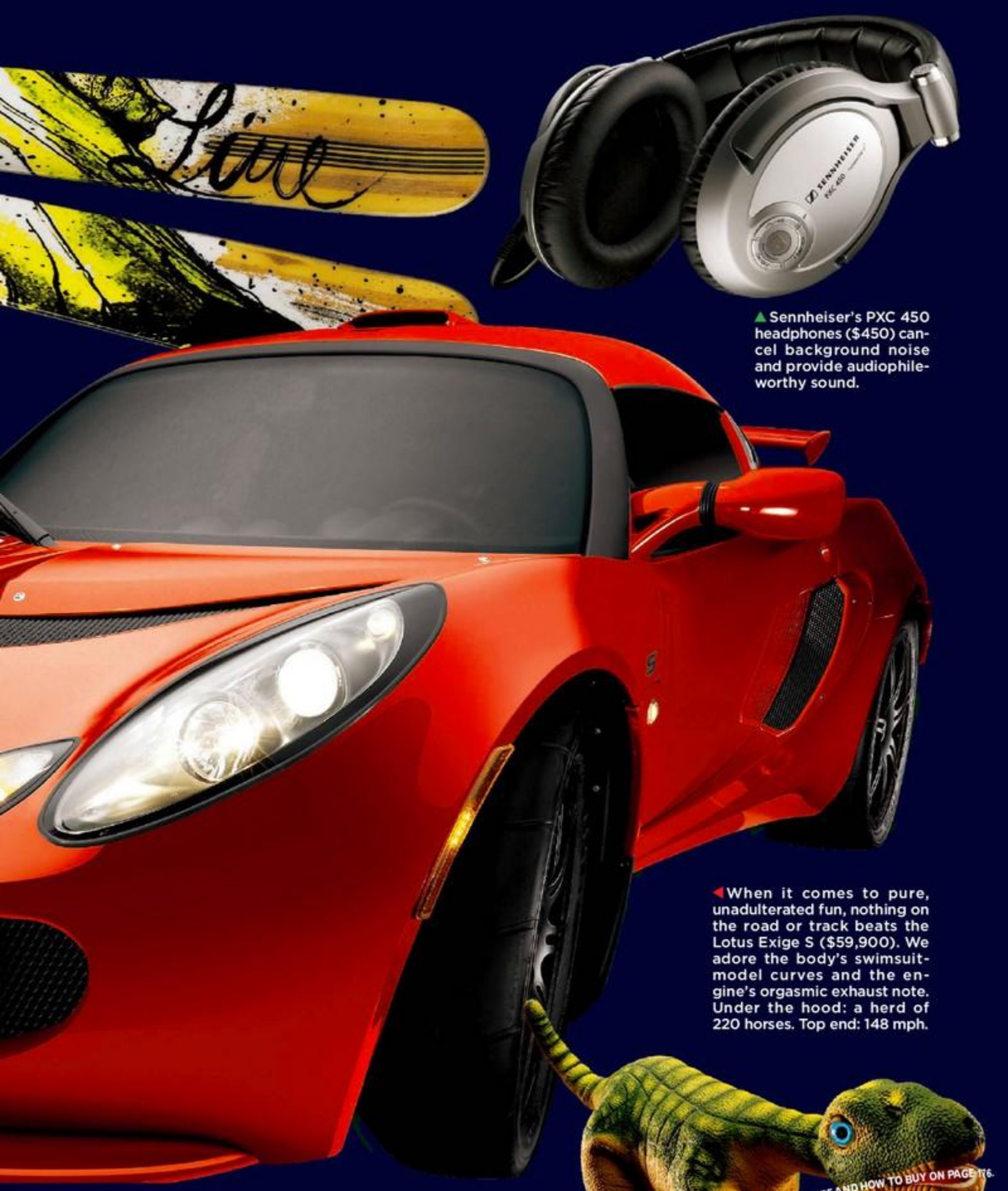
▲Line Prophet 130 skis ($900) are a breeze in the powder (and just about everywhere else) thanks to their extra-wide shape, raised tips and flared tails.

▼The Italians are known for hot cars and buttery leather. Maserati and Ferragamo have teamed to create a hot buttered travel collection. (Duffle pictured $1,765, set $9,040.)

◀Speakers and eight gigabytes of storage mean Nokia's N81 8GB phone ($630) is made for music. Wi-Fi and a large screen let you surf the Net in style.

◀Clocks are mankind's attempt to tame the fundamental unruliness of time's passage. Cyclos's Day & Night ($7,900) represents the fluidity between daytime and nighttime through the Möbius-strip design on its face. Philosophers, rejoice!

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES IMBROGNO

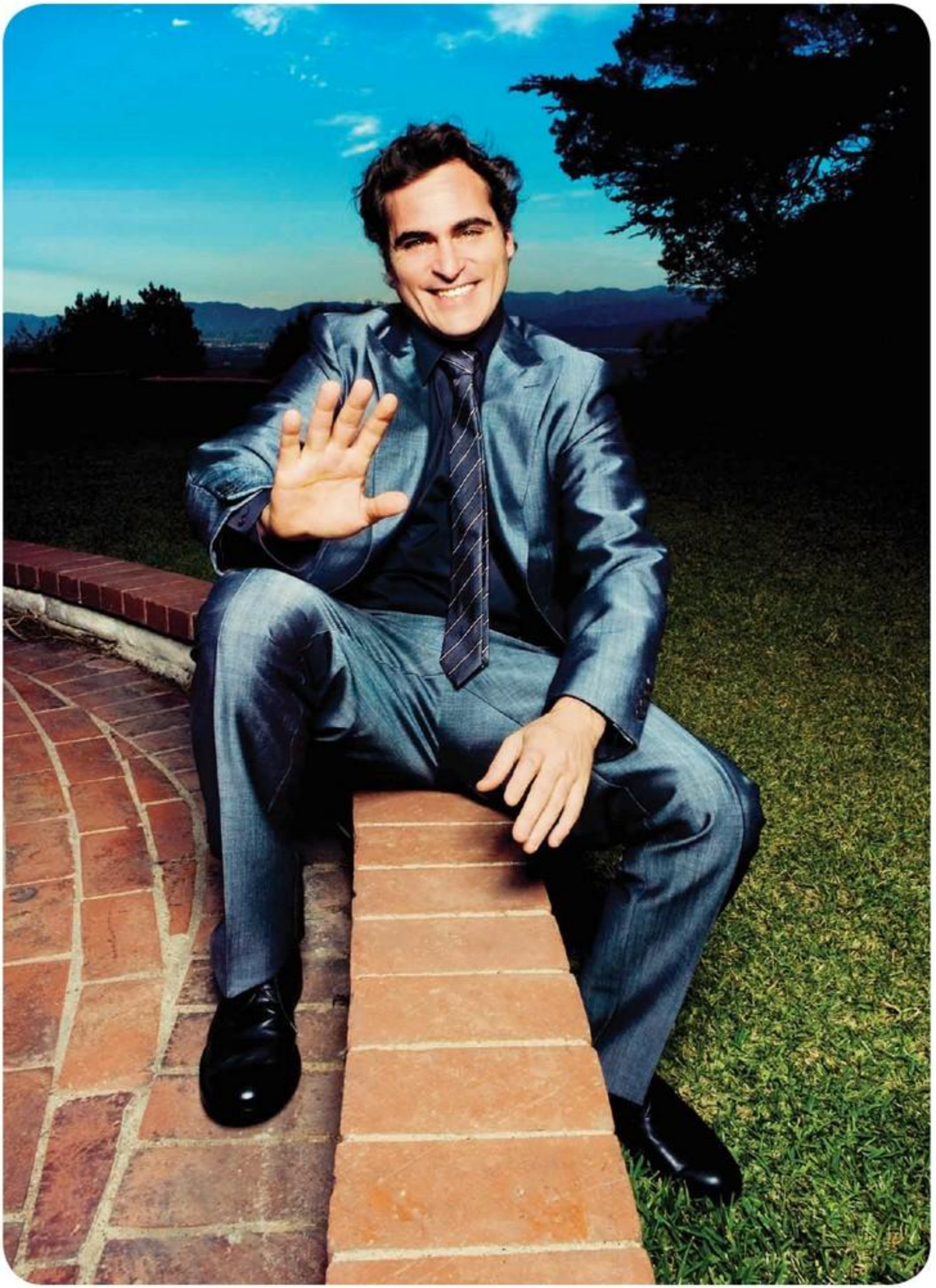


▲ Sennheiser's PXC 450 headphones ($450) cancel background noise and provide audiophile-worthy sound.

◀ When it comes to pure, unadulterated fun, nothing on the road or track beats the Lotus Exige S ($59,900). We adore the body's swimsuit-model curves and the engine's orgasmic exhaust note. Under the hood: a herd of 220 horses. Top end: 148 mph.

▶ At the nexus of science and play sits Pleo ($350), an autonomous robotic baby dinosaur. You interact with him as you would an animal, through touch and voice, and in turn he develops a unique personality.

WHERE AND HOW TO BUY ON PAGE 176.



20 QUESTIONS

BY STEPHEN REBELLO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL MULLER

JOAQUIN PHOENIX

THE ECCENTRIC EX-HIPPIE TALKS ABOUT REHAB (A MUST FOR AN ACTOR), LIFE AFTER DEATH (IT DOESN'T EXIST), THAT VIDEOTAPE OF HIS PAINFUL TATTOO (REAL MEN DO CRY) AND WHY HE WASN'T EVA MENDES'S LITTLE PUPPY (HE WAS JUST TOO BUSY)

Q1

PLAYBOY: You won Oscar nominations for playing tortured, troubled characters in *Gladiator* and *Walk the Line*. Why do you gravitate toward dark, difficult roles?

PHOENIX: I'm flattered when people say that about me, but they often give me more credit than I deserve. Early on, there wasn't much strategy in choosing roles. I didn't get offered 400 movies; I got offered four, and I did those movies. Let's be honest: If I were six-foot-two, blond and incredibly muscular, they would have been banging down my door. Any actor who doesn't admit that is wrong. But once you've established yourself, you try to break out to the other place.

Q2

PLAYBOY: By "the other place," do you mean having the opportunity to do leading-man roles?

PHOENIX: The irony is that I am suddenly being offered all those things usually offered to the six-foot-two blond guy with the big chest. And I'm going, "Are you motherfuckers crazy? I'm finally fucking starting to get into some real work, and now you want me to make movies where I run around with a fucking gun, chasing dudes?" I can't understand actors who, after busting their asses for years, get nominated for an Oscar at the age of 45 and win it, and the next 10 movies they make are fucking crap.

Q3

PLAYBOY: You were born in Puerto Rico and traveled extensively in Central and South America with your parents, who were missionaries for the Children of God cult. Did that experience equip you for the real world?

PHOENIX: I don't know what experience could possibly equip anybody for the real world. I grew up poor but had a worldly, rich experience. I adapt very well to many situations, and I am comfortable in a number of environments and with different people. I wouldn't change a thing.

Q4

PLAYBOY: You began acting at the age of eight, but in 1993 you became famous when the public heard you on a 911 call from a pay phone outside the Viper Room, getting help for your older brother River, who had suffered a fatal drug overdose. It's hard enough to imagine what that was like for you and your family, but imagine how that call and those events would have been exploited today on blogs like TMZ.com and in the celebrity weeklies.

PHOENIX: It was awful. When my brother passed it was toward the end of an era, and you're right: If it had happened much later, it would have been on a lot of fucking blogs. The amount of information flying back and forth now has just gone beyond comprehension. I suppose there has always been an equivalent throughout history, but in some ways it's hard to swallow. It makes you feel sick about yourself and about human beings. You look at yourself and say, When have I exploited others and been voyeuristic? If someone starts talking about a mutual friend, I say, "I don't want to know." I don't even read interviews with people I know. I may read an interview with a politician, but if that politician were banging his assistant, I wouldn't read it, and I don't care.

Q5

PLAYBOY: You don't care because you think that information is irrelevant to the politician's *(continued on page 178)*

MANHATTAN MODEL

MISS DECEMBER TAKES A BITE OUT OF THE BIG APPLE

I like to wear no clothes," says Sasckya Porto. "If it weren't illegal to walk naked in the streets on a hot day, I would do it. For me it's natural." We can only imagine the riot Sasckya would cause if she were to climb nude out of a taxi onto a busy street in New York City, where she makes her home. She lures all eyes even when she's fully clothed. The 23-year-old statuesque beauty stands five feet 10 inches, and that's without heels. When she saunters down Fifth Avenue, she doesn't so much walk as catwalk. And when she speaks, her Brazilian accent weakens the knees.

Yes, Sasckya ("sas-KEE-ah") is from Brazil. You've heard of the place. It's populated with supermodels who hang around tropical beaches, wearing bathing suits invisible to the human eye. The models have names like Gisele, Adriana, Alessandra. They are perpetually bronzed and always seem to be on the verge of arousal. In America they are the quintessential exotic beauties. As far as we're concerned, we have discovered the next Brazilian import. Sasckya was raised in Campina Grande, near Recife, a subtropical city perched on an arching blond beach. "I would trade Recife for Rio de Janeiro never!" she says. As a child Sasckya liked ballet and sports, but at the age of 13 she won a beauty pageant, and just like that she became a model. "I did commercials for Toyota and World Cup soccer," she says. "At 15 I started doing runway shows and left dancing and volleyball behind." When Sasckya was 17, her family moved to Boston, and she went to Boston University. She didn't like the cold, but she learned a lot about marketing, which she uses today in her modeling. "It's all marketing," she says. "I'm selling me!"

Why *did* Sasckya want to be a Playmate? "Why not?" she says, laughing. "In Brazil we are not ashamed of our bodies. I love nude beaches because you don't get any marks on your body when you sun. So for me to pose for PLAYBOY was not hard. Don't get me wrong: PLAYBOY is a classy magazine, the only one I would take my clothes off for." When asked if she prefers Brazilian men to Americans, she answers, "I like all men—Brazilian, American, Chinese, Japanese, all of them! I like to talk to Americans most; they are more respectful than the others."

Miss December says she wants to be a star. New York is full of people with fiery ambition, but Sasckya is different. Her beauty is obvious—even profound—but her personality is what will win over the world. The look in her eyes says it all: mischief, appetite, fearlessness, lust. She says she's ready for the spotlight or anything else that comes her way. "If you know where you come from and attention doesn't go to your head," she says, "you'll be fine."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNY FREYTAG

DO NOT
DISTURB

Miss December peels the wrapping paper off the greatest holiday gift you'll get this year or any other. Her name is Sasckya Porto. She hails from Campina Grande, Brazil and lives in New York City, where she works as a model. "We come from a naked country," she says about Brazilian models. "We are used to being loose and sexy."

See more of Miss December at cyber.playboy.com.

MISS DECEMBER
PLAYBOY'S PLAYMATE OF THE MONTH
Sasckya Porto

PLAYMATE DATA SHEET

NAME: Sasckya Porto

BUST: 34C WAIST: 23 HIPS: 35

HEIGHT: 5'10" WEIGHT: 123

BIRTH DATE: 10-31-84 BIRTHPLACE: BRAZIL

AMBITIONS: Since I have been a model for 10 years, I see my career going a little longer. Then I will start acting.

TURN-ONS: A serious, well-educated, masculine man. People who make me laugh.

TURNOFFS: People who show off and smell bad.

MY FAVORITE SONG TO SING: DIDO'S "Thank you."

SPORTS I PLAY AND WATCH: Volleyball, golf and soccer. I enjoy watching baseball.

A LITTLE ABOUT MY FAMILY: My parents were born in BRAZIL, and I have a younger brother and sister.

THE SEXIEST CITY IN THE WORLD: New York City.

MYSELF IN A FEW WORDS: Classic, funny, simple, smart.

Six years old, at Grandma's house in BRAZIL.

11 years old, dancing the quadrilha in BRAZIL.

17 years old, when I won Miss BRASIL USA.

PLAYBOY'S PARTY JOKES

What do you call a truck full of vibrators at Christmas?

Toys for twats.

"I'm having problems with my hearing," a man said to his doctor.

"Hmm," said the doctor. "Can you describe the symptoms?"

"Sure," said the man. "Homer is fat and yellow, Marge has big hair...."

A small boy wrote to Santa Claus, "Send me a brother."

Santa wrote back, "Send me your mother."

"Honey, if I die, I know you'll eventually remarry," a man said to his wife. "So as soon as I'm gone I want you to sell all my stuff."

"Now why would you want me to do that?" she asked.

"Well," he replied, "I don't want some other asshole using all my stuff."

She replied, "What makes you think I'd marry another asshole?"

A young boy asked his dad, "What is the difference between *confident* and *confidential*?"

"You are my son. I'm confident about that," the father said. "Your friend next door is also my son, but that's confidential."

"I think I'm going to divorce my wife," a man said to his friend. "She hasn't spoken to me in more than three months."

"You better think it over," his friend said. "Women like that are hard to find."

The trouble with political jokes is that they sometimes get elected.

A man came home very late to find his wife waiting at the door. "You've been out fucking around, haven't you?" she said angrily.

"Nope," he said, smiling drunkenly.

"Then explain the lipstick on your shirt!" she shouted.

"That's easy," he replied. "I used my shirt to wipe off my dick."

A young wife whispered in her husband's ear one night. "Let's make love differently tonight. Let's do it back-to-back."

"Don't be stupid," replied the husband. "That's impossible."

"No it isn't," said the wife. "I've invited the neighbors over."

A man was walking home through the park one night and saw a woman in the shadows. "Twenty dollars," she whispered.

The man had never been with a hooker before but decided that for only 20 bucks he couldn't afford to miss out. They were going at it in the woods when all of a sudden a light flashed on them.

"Hey, what's going on here?" barked a policeman.

"I'm making love to my wife," the man answered indignantly.

"Oh, I'm sorry," said the cop. "I didn't know."

"Well," said the man, "I didn't know either until you shined the light on her face."

When a woman tells her boyfriend she has a perfect figure, she expects him to grasp what she's talking about.

"I bet you mine is longer soft than yours is hard," an old man said to a teenager.

"Impossible," the boy said. "I'll take your bet. How long is yours soft?"

The old man replied, "Eleven years."

A friend of ours joined a nudist camp last week—he said the first day was the hardest.

Why do women pay more attention to their appearance than to improving their mind?

Because most men are stupid, but few are blind.

Send your jokes to Party Jokes Editor, PLAYBOY, *730 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10019, or by e-mail through our website at jokes.playboy.com.* PLAYBOY *will pay $100 to the contributors whose submissions are selected.*

"I've got to hand it to you—every year, the perfect stocking stuffer!"

FASHION BY
JOSEPH DE ACETIS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
HARRY BENSON

PRODUCED BY
JENNIFER RYAN JONES

A NIGHT AT THE BOX

BURLESQUE AND BLACK TIE MEET AT THE HOTTEST UNDERGROUND CLUB IN NEW YORK

Step behind the velvet curtain and welcome to the Box: a dinner theater of the absurd, proper attire required. "We have a sense of decadence and uninhibited fun. We try to keep everyone on their toes," says co-owner Simon Hammerstein (yes, of those Hammersteins). The entertainment on any given night may include beautiful burlesque dancers or beatboxing flautists or perhaps opera singers wearing *luchador* masks. "Our patrons are part of the intelligentsia, a discerning and jaded crowd that prefers to remain anonymous," Hammerstein says. But anonymity is a fleeting thing for Lindsay Lohan, Jay-Z and Demi Moore, who have all been spotted at the intimate lounge on Manhattan's Lower East Side. The big draw for those in the know—who shell out up to $900 just to secure a table—is Raven O (above center), the bawdy ringleader of this splendid circus. "I want my performance to make the house push its sexual boundaries," he says, adjusting his tie. "Even if it's only in their mind."

Above left: His suit ($4,200), vest ($1,050), shirt ($3,060) and tie ($160) are by BOTTEGA VENETA. Above center: Raven O's tuxedo ($2,995) is by DSQUARED. His shirt ($145) is by ROBERT TALBOTT. His bow tie ($115) is by SEAWARD & STEARN OF LONDON. His socks ($75) are by PANTHERELLA. His cuff links ($55) are by SONIA SPENCER. Above right: His tuxedo ($995) is by LUIGI BIANCHI MANTOVA. His shirt ($450) is by BORRELLI. His tie ($165) and pocket square ($85) are by SEAWARD & STEARN OF LONDON.

"THE BOX IS KNOWN FOR ITS PRIVATE TABLES WHERE CURTAINS CAN BE PULLED TIGHT FOR COMPLETE PRIVACY."

NEW YORK POST

His tuxedo ($3,000) and shirt ($440) are by SALVATORE FERRAGAMO. His bow tie ($85) is by ROBERT TALBOTT.

"MY GENERATION'S THEATER: STREET PERFORMERS AND ACTS YOU SEE AT AN AMSTERDAM SEX CLUB."

SIMON HAMMERSTEIN

His tuxedo ($1,000) and shirt ($125) are by CHARLES TYRWHITT. His bow tie ($85) is by ROBERT TALBOTT. His pocket square ($85) is by SEAWARD & STEARN OF LONDON. His cuff links ($50) are by SONIA SPENCER. Dancers' costumes were designed by ED SYLVIA.

Below from left: His tuxedo and shirt (prices available on request) are by VERSACE. His bow tie ($85) and pocket square ($55) are by ROBERT TALBOTT. Raven O's tuxedo ($2,920), shirt ($375) and bow tie ($135) are by VALENTINO. His pocket square ($55) is by ROBERT TALBOTT. Dancers' costumes were designed by ED SYLVIA.

Opposite page, standing: His tuxedo ($4,200), shirt ($405) and bow tie ($175) are by BORRELLI. His pocket square ($55) is by ROBERT TALBOTT. Sitting: His tuxedo ($1,595) is by CANALI. His shirt ($210), bow tie ($85) and pocket square ($55) are by ROBERT TALBOTT. His shoes ($1,380) are by JOHN LOBB. His socks ($75) are by PANTHERELLA.

"IT'S NORMAL TO FEEL A LITTLE SEXUALLY JARRED WHEN YOU WALK INTO THE THEATER."

RAVEN O

FOR MORE BLACK TIE OFF THE GREAT WHITE WAY VISIT PLAYBOY.COM.

WHERE AND HOW TO BUY ON PAGE 176.

EVERYONE LOVES Jimmy

BUT NO ONE LOVES HIM MORE THAN SARAH SILVERMAN. JOIN COMEDY'S FUNNIEST COUPLE AS THEY DATE, FLIRT AND PUSH HIS CAREER TO NEW HEIGHTS

BY BILL ZEHME

James Christian Kimmel is a man you would do well to envy, and the sooner you accept that fact in your unfathomable heart, the better chance you will have of improving your own lackluster life. For certain, my friend Kimmel (and also yours) once envied other people, but this only emboldened his dreams. And look at him now: He overtips servers like Sinatra. He gorges himself as would Henry VIII (if the Tudors had been big on calzones, grinders and buffalo wings). His festive home contains no fewer than 17 deluxe television sets (bathroom consoles included), on which he can watch himself be mirthful and charming at his high-paying late-night TV job (though satellite football broadcasts are the preferred on-premises viewing; personal vainglory, you see, means nothing to him). Also, his woman—quite the woman, this one!—is incalculably hot and formidable and possessed of notorious wiles that terrify lesser men and most mammals. And that is but a fraction of his dizzyingly happy lot. Indeed, there is much worth emulating in the life of Kimmel, except for maybe—let's just get this out of the way now—the narcolepsy problem (without medication he can fall asleep while driving, eating, working) and the corrective surgeries to reopen the timid mouth of his penis (or, in clinical parlance, his urinary meatus; "I don't recommend the procedure to anyone," he will wincingly caution). Still, here is a man of considerable heart and generosity who loves much, loves enthusiastically and loves nothing more than the ever fertile prospect of Good Times—the two hopeful words

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ZACH CORDNER

he reflexively employs most often in life, especially during awkward conversations, in dashed e-mail sign-offs and when nothing else interesting comes to mind. "*Good times!*" he will declare at such moments, and in so doing I believe he aims to project unbridled optimism not just onto his own private world (even he needs reassurance!) but also onto yours, should you happen to enter his. He is just that caring of a guy.

And so, on your behalf, I entered the private world of James "Jimmy" Kimmel one sparkling morning not long ago and right away felt the disarming warmth of his metaphoric embrace (no actual caressing, thank you). It is a phenomenon, subtle yet intense, that engenders the fiercest loyalty in all who have known him (except maybe his ex-wife), each of whom would blindly follow him into the minefield of Kimmel's choosing. (Instead, of course, he chose a late-night network comedy talk show, ABC's *Jimmy Kimmel Live,* wherein his devout minions toil valiantly as ratings steadily surge inch by mile, but so far nobody's been killed, for which, hey—*good times!*) Anyway, upon entering his world (first stop: the rambling fun house with all the TVs and other arcane whimsies perched above Lake Hollywood in hilly Los Angeles) I was welcomed at the kitchen door, which spoke volumes about his shimmering lack of pretense and the fact that he was planning to play chef, as is his proud and elaborate custom. "I'm going to make you some eggs, a nice big omelet—whatever you want!" he quickly announced, gesturing toward a vast counter neatly lined with many bowls of meticulously hand-prepped diced and sliced herbs, meats, cheeses, etc. (He had begun the culinary busywork in the wee hours of the previous night, long after his show had ended.) "What ingredients do you like? When I cook, I go crazy. I have bacon that I made. What kind of cheese do you like? I've got Parmesan, Asiago, cheddar—nice, right? Tomatoes, basil, mushrooms? Everyone says they gain between 10 and 15 pounds after meeting me."

He is in this way a tsunami of indulgence, and it did not stop there, because next he handed me an envelope and, with an adolescent shrug, said, "I made you a card." Indeed, from the American Greetings Ellen Collection, which features sentiments delivered by a cartoon Ellen DeGeneres—"She's got a whole series of cards," he informed me, mordantly gleeful. "Isn't that wonderful?"—the card served only to draw me deeper into his easy confidences. On the front, quoth DeGeneres, "You're such a good friend, I feel like I can tell you anything." Inside: "But then the police would consider you an 'accessory.'" Below which, in antic capital letters, he had scrawled, "I think this says it all! Jimmy."

To that end, after riding across several rollicking days and nights in his always forthright midst, there is no question I could now be brought up on the aforementioned charge. But first the law would have to recognize some nefarious infraction regarding interpersonal collusion (I think that's my job description here) with this unstoppable 40-year-old man-boy dervish (1) who eagerly hoards people and passions as though they were black-market plunder, (2) whose voracious life appetites empower both his work and his play, making either pursuit nearly indistinguishable from the other, and (3) whose heroic half-decade ascent in the late-night desk-jockey pantheon has been buoyed in no slight fashion by the unconditional support and steadfast love of a Good Woman named Sarah Kate Silverman, a.k.a. the comedic hell kitten nonpareil, memorably lauded this year in the exultant headline splashed above the *Village Voice* writer Michael Musto's affectionate essay "Sarah Silverman Is My Kind of Cunt." (Silverman treasures a photo of a friend's baby daughter proudly holding the article aloft.) As with generations of model couples before them, she irrefutably represents that, uh, soft, bolstering force that propels her man toward great achievement, not to mention a more sensible diet. ("Jimmy," she once said, "would take a bite out of a cow." But she said it with a certain pride, I'm fairly sure, no matter that she is a vegetarian.)

"I'll be honest with you," says Silverman. "The guy is fucking crazy about me."

So profound is her love for Kimmel, she has boasted she could easily identify the scent of his testicles in a police lineup, blindfolded. Also, she has giddily confessed the details of their cherished postintercourse tradition wherein she trills into his ear the tender words "You're a fucking pig!" ("He laughs," she once coyly reported to Howard Stern. "But he really is like an animal.") In his presence, I will tell you, she becomes an altogether different woman—sweet, pliant, effusive, fawning—yet all the while retains her classic physical attributes, including problem body hair.

(He once aptly summed up this spectrum by introducing her on his program with, "Say hello to the affectionate and furry Sarah Silverman!" Then, minutes later, he helpfully pointed out for viewers, "Your arms are like those of a chimpanzee.") Though they live separately (her apartment is 15 minutes from the Kimmel pleasure dome), they convene in his bed nightly, blissfully free of matrimonial licensing. "I just feel like we are married in our hearts," she says. "Why get the government involved? It would ruin it." Hovering beside him, she glows with awestruck adoration. Or, as she would privately share with me in one of many fine candid moments, "He makes me want to be a better man."

Date-night discourse (as recorded one recent Friday over dinner at Wolfgang Puck's Cut steak house in Beverly Hills).

SS: When my sisters and I would visit my nana back in New Hampshire, we'd surprise her. The second she'd see us coming in the door, these emotions stirred inside her, and she'd bite her lower lip with happiness. I feel like I understand that kind of happiness now.

JK: Like a grandchild you love me?

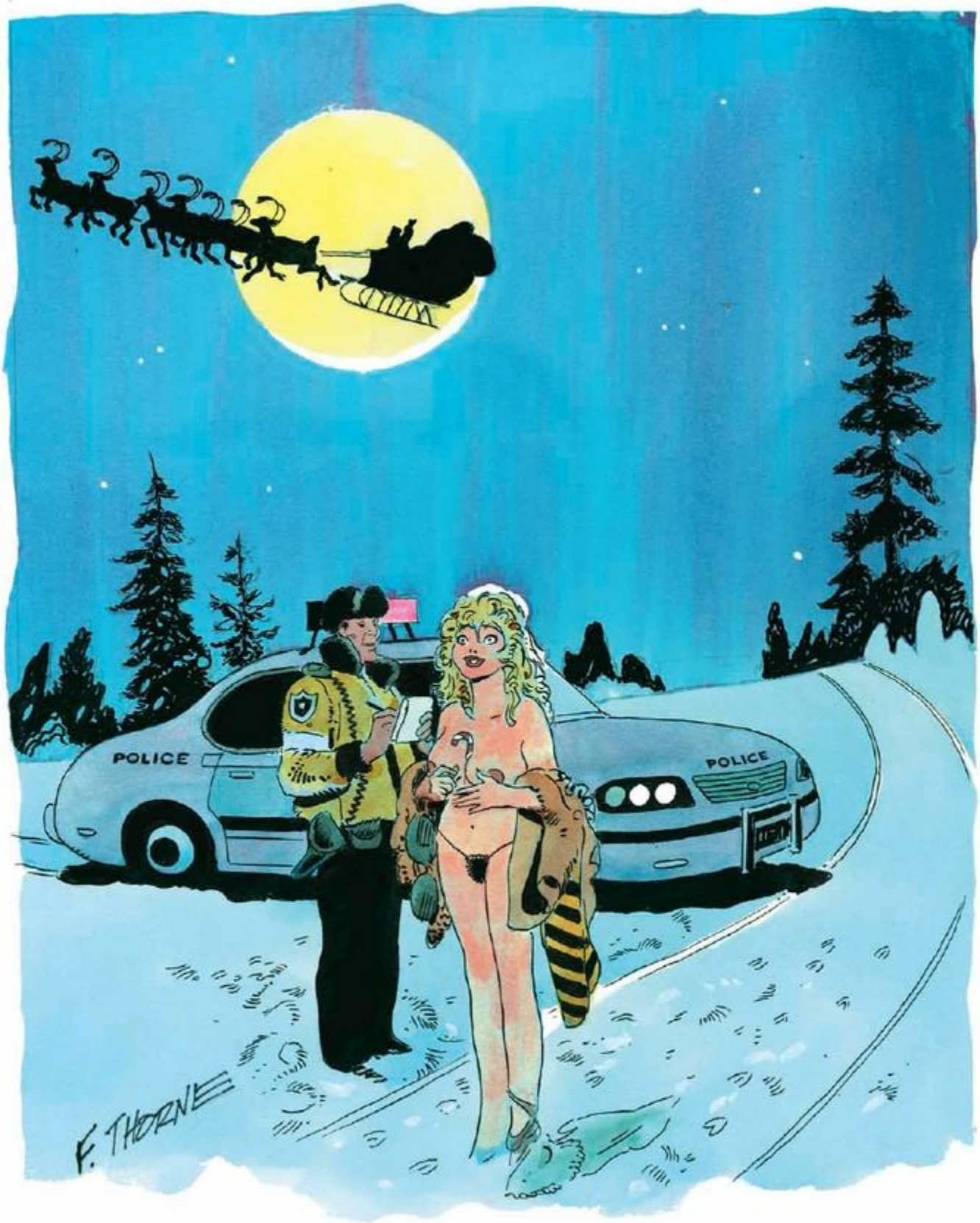
SS: It's so gay! It's gay, right?

JK: It's not gay. You think of me as a grandson.

SS: No, it's about being deeply moved by loving someone....

JK: I heard a crazy thing. I read it in a newspaper, then tried finding more information about it online because it was haunting me. Chinese grandmothers will calm their grandsons down—supposedly this lasts well into their 20s—by giving them blow jobs. Haunting, right?

Theirs is a Love Story for the Ages (target demographic: upscale adults, 18 to 49), a sacrosanct mantle not lost on either of them. "Jobs come and go," Silverman has told me, "but love you look for your whole life...." (Her ellipses, it should be noted, always flutter off dreamily toward a yearnful sigh and never the belch you may expect from watching Comedy Central's joyously twisted gambol *The Sarah Silverman Program.*) Which brings *(continued on page 192)*



"His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!"

TIP OFF '08

Experience is the key. Teams that have been there, done that will do it again

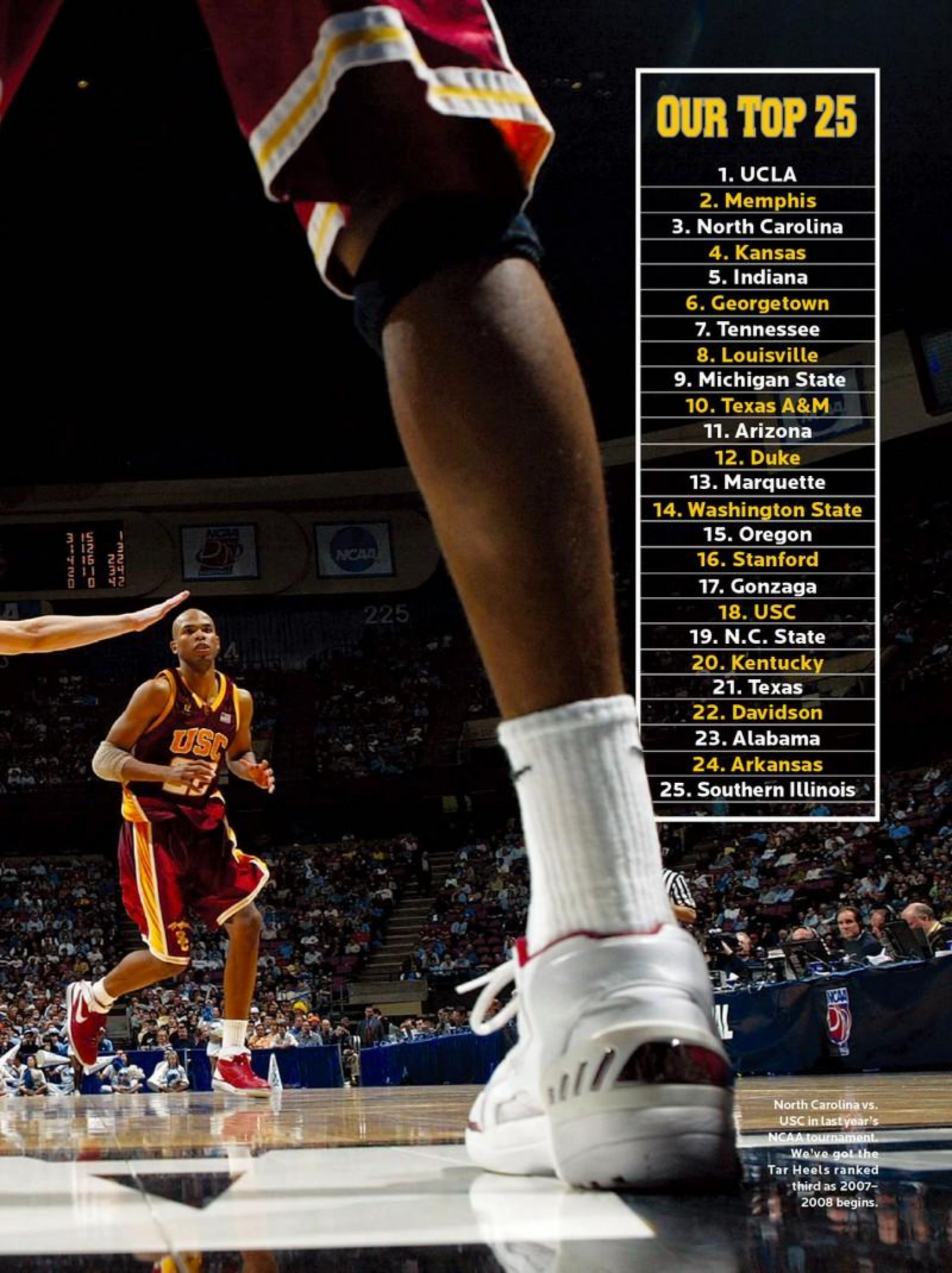
No sporting event in America draws more viewers than the NCAA tournament. It's bigger than the World Series, bigger than the Super Bowl. March is the month of madness that sees more money dumped into Vegas sports books than any other time of the year. Amid all the hoopla it's easy to forget these athletes are amateurs. They play for all the right reasons: school pride, love of the game and, yes, for some, future NBA paychecks.

This past April, for the first time in NCAA history, the Florida Gators repeated as champs with the same starting lineup as the year before. Nowadays nothing beats experience in college hoops. It is the key to winning, period. Nine of the past 10 champions have been led by upperclassmen who chose to stay in school rather than jump to the NBA. The players who know the ins and outs of the college game are the ones who lead their squads to greatness. This season will be more of the same. You'll witness incredible talents such as returning stars Roy Hibbert and Tyler Hansbrough, as well as superhyped freshmen like UCLA's six-foot-10 center Kevin Love and

BY DAVID KAPLAN

OUR TOP 25

1. UCLA
2. Memphis
3. North Carolina
4. Kansas
5. Indiana
6. Georgetown
7. Tennessee
8. Louisville
9. Michigan State
10. Texas A&M
11. Arizona
12. Duke
13. Marquette
14. Washington State
15. Oregon
16. Stanford
17. Gonzaga
18. USC
19. N.C. State
20. Kentucky
21. Texas
22. Davidson
23. Alabama
24. Arkansas
25. Southern Illinois



North Carolina vs. USC in last year's NCAA tournament. We've got the Tar Heels ranked third as 2007–2008 begins.

THE PLAYBOY 2007–2008 PRESEASON

COLLEGE ALL AMERICA TEAM

GUARDS

Chris Lofton • Tennessee • 6'2" • Senior
Perhaps the best college three-point shooter in the nation, Lofton has a career percentage of 43.8 from outside the arc. He has won SEC Player of the Week honors six times, tying for the most in conference history.

Courtney Lee • Western Kentucky • 6'5" • Senior
Never heard of the Western Kentucky Hilltoppers? Now you have. Senior swingman Lee's explosive offensive play has NBA scouts drooling. He averaged 17.3 points last year, leading the team to a 22-win season.

Darren Collison • UCLA • 6'1" • Junior
Collison's style of play is all about speed. He averaged 5.7 assists and 2.2 steals a game last season, making a major contribution to UCLA's run to the Final Four. This year look for those numbers to jump even higher.

Brandon Rush • Kansas • 6'6" • Junior
Rush led the Jayhawks in scoring each of the past two seasons and was the first freshman in Kansas's history to lead the team in scoring and rebounding. Now a junior, he has the experience to match the talent.

FORWARDS

Chase Budinger • Arizona • 6'7" • Sophomore
Last season Budinger averaged 15.6 points a game and 5.8 rebounds as a freshman with the Wildcats. He possesses a 40-plus-inch vertical jump and was the 2006 Mizuno national high school volleyball player of the year.

Joseph Jones • Texas A&M • 6'9" • Senior
A powerful low-post player, Jones relies on his great body strength to bully opposing players near the basket, and he has developed a midrange jump shot to complement his play in the paint. He averaged 13.4 points a game and 6.8 rebounds last season.

James Mays • Clemson • 6'9" • Senior
An extremely quick post player, Mays anchors Clemson's pressure defense. He totaled 69 steals and 95 assists in 2006–2007 and holds the Tigers record for steals and assists in a season by a frontcourt player.

Tyler Hansbrough • North Carolina • 6'9" • Junior
Only the third ACC freshman ever to earn AP All-America honors, Hansbrough averaged 18.4 points a game last season and 7.9 rebounds to boot. UNC's strength coach nicknamed him Psycho T for his determined work in the weight room.

CENTERS

Roy Hibbert • Georgetown • 7'2" • Senior
An imposing presence on the court (he weighs 278 pounds), Hibbert uses his size to dominate inside. His shooting percentage from the floor and the free-throw line both approach 70 percent.

Brook Lopez • Stanford • 7' • Sophomore
A star in his first season with Stanford, Lopez averaged 12.6 points and six rebounds a game. In one four-game streak, he scored 20 or more points each, topping out at 26 against Oregon.

COACH OF THE YEAR

Ben Howland • UCLA
Since taking over the UCLA program in 2003, Howland has chalked up a 91–41 record. Even more impressive, he has led the team to two straight Final Fours. His leadership and knowledge have much to do with why we're picking the Bruins to go all the way this season.

See more NCAA coverage at playboy.com/magazine.

USC's six-foot-five guard O.J. Mayo. The race for the title is wide open. Don't even think of blinking your eyes. Here's how we see things shaking out.

1. UCLA The Bruins have made the Final Four two years in a row, with squads displaying sick amounts of talent. This season's lineup promises to be even better than those predecessors. Guard Arron Afflalo bolted for the NBA, but with Darren Collison back at the point, leading returning scorer Josh Shipp back on the wing and Luc Richard Mbah a Moute back inside, experience and explosive scoring capability remain. **Emerging star:** Center Kevin Love was everybody's choice as the top freshman recruit in the country. He should make an immediate impact under the net for coach Ben Howland. **Key stat:** Last year the Bruins were top in the Pac 10 in average scoring margin: 9.4 points.

2. Memphis Never has Memphis entered a season with as much talent and hype. Head coach John Calipari has done a magnificent job building a powerhouse program in Elvis country, and the natives are paying attention with sold-out crowds. Every starter is back from last year's Elite Eight squad. Guard Chris Douglas-Roberts will lead the attack; he averaged 15.4 points a game as a sophomore last season, and the Tigers are deep up front with bruisers Joey Dorsey and Robert Dozier. **Emerging star:** Point guard Derrick Rose, a high school standout from Chicago, could be Newcomer of the Year. **Don't miss:** Two early matchups will set the tone for Memphis: Georgetown comes to the FedExForum three days before Christmas, and Arizona arrives one week later.

3. North Carolina So the Tar Heels lost Brandan Wright to the NBA and added no recruits. Why are we still ranking them number three? Eleven players from last season's Elite Eight team return, and they are on a mission to get coach Roy Williams to the finals. The front-runner for National Player of the Year, power forward Tyler Hansbrough, anchors the squad. He's the only Tar Heel ever to lead the team in scoring and rebounding as a freshman and a sophomore. Guards Ty Lawson and Wayne Ellington also return. **Emerging star:** Williams tells PLAYBOY that sophomore point guard Lawson could be the greatest floor leader he has ever coached. **Don't miss:** The Tar Heels play archrival Duke on the road on March 8. The result will certainly affect how both teams are seeded in the tourney.

4. Kansas The Jayhawks roster returns with 85 percent of its scoring and 80 percent of its rebounding from a squad *(continued on page 200)*

Festive Frolics

GRAB THE BALLOT
ROCK THIS VOTE
Rock and roll ebbs and flows, but one thing is sure about 2007: This year witnessed a high-water mark for the genre. Hell, except for Kanye, 50 and T.I., it felt as if hip-hop were barely even there. Instead, indie heroes like Spoon planted their flag in the mainstream, dinosaurs such as Van Halen and Led Zeppelin reunited for shows, old-school R&B belters resurfaced and were reborn, and the singer-songwriter tradition of country was renewed by albums from Miranda Lambert (pictured here) and Gretchen Wilson. And with left-field breakout artists like Gym Class Heroes and Justice, as well as the now usual list of Internet geniuses, there was no shortage of wizardry and wonder for the sonic adventurer.
Miranda Lambert
PLAYBOY'S
2007
MUSIC POLL
VOTE + HEAR CLIPS @ PLAYBOY.COM/MAGAZINE.

PLAYBOY'S
2007

MUSIC POLL

HERE'S THE OFFICIAL BALLOT. RIP IT OUT, VOTE AND THEN MAIL IT IN. YOU CAN TICK OFF BOXES, OR IF YOU THINK YOU'RE SO DAMN SMART, WRITE IN YOUR OWN FAVORITE ARTISTS. STILL TOO MUCH TROUBLE? YOU CAN ALSO VOTE ONLINE @ WWW.PLAYBOYMUSICPOLL.COM.

↓ FOLD HERE ↓ ↓ FOLD HERE ↓

→ CHECK BOXES FOR FAVORITE IN EACH CATEGORY

BEST ROCK ALBUM

- ☐ *GA GA GA GA GA*, SPOON
- ☐ *ZEITGEIST*, SMASHING PUMPKINS
- ☐ *INFINITY ON HIGH*, FALL OUT BOY
- ☐ *NEON BIBLE*, ARCADE FIRE
- ☐ *ICKY THUMP*, THE WHITE STRIPES
- ☐ *WRITE-IN VOTE:*

_____

BEST HIP-HOP ALBUM

- ☐ *GRADUATION*, KANYE WEST
- ☐ *T.I. VS T.I.P.*, T.I.
- ☐ *CURTIS*, 50 CENT
- ☐ *FINDING FOREVER*, COMMON
- ☐ *HUSTLENOMICS*, YUNG JOC
- ☐ *WRITE-IN VOTE:*

_____

BEST ELECTRONIC ALBUM

- ☐ *SOUND OF SILVER*, LCD SOUNDSYSTEM
- ☐ *CROSS*, JUSTICE
- ☐ *IDEALISM*, DIGITALISM
- ☐ *FROM HERE WE GO SUBLIME*, THE FIELD
- ☐ *WE ARE THE NIGHT*, THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS
- ☐ *WRITE-IN VOTE:*

_____

BEST COUNTRY ALBUM

- ☐ *LIVING HARD*, GARY ALLAN
- ☐ *LET IT GO*, TIM MCGRAW
- ☐ *JUST WHO I AM*, KENNY CHESNEY
- ☐ *CRAZY EX-GIRLFRIEND*, MIRANDA LAMBERT
- ☐ *WAGON MASTER*, PORTER WAGONER
- ☐ *WRITE-IN VOTE:*

_____

↑ FOLD HERE ↑

BEST JAZZ ALBUM

- ☐ *A TALE OF GOD'S WILL*, TERENCE BLANCHARD
- ☐ *CORNELL 1964*, CHARLES MINGUS SEXTET
- ☐ *FROM THE RIVER TO THE OCEAN*, FRED ANDERSON & HAMID DRAKE
- ☐ *FOLLOW THE RED LINE*, CHRIS POTTER UNDERGROUND
- ☐ *THIS MEETS THAT*, JOHN SCOFIELD
- ☐ *WRITE-IN VOTE:*

_____

BEST SOUNDTRACK

- ☐ *ZIDANE*
- ☐ *ONCE*
- ☐ *KURT COBAIN: ABOUT A SON*
- ☐ *THE HOTTEST STATE*
- ☐ *INTO THE WILD*
- ☐ *WRITE-IN VOTE:*

_____

BEST SONG

- ☐ "REHAB," AMY WINEHOUSE
- ☐ "CUPID'S CHOKEHOLD," GYM CLASS HEROES
- ☐ "UMBRELLA," RIHANNA
- ☐ "STRONGER," KANYE WEST
- ☐ "GIRLFRIEND," AVRIL LAVIGNE
- ☐ *WRITE-IN VOTE:*

_____

BEST WORLD MUSIC ALBUM

- ☐ *LA RADIOLINA*, MANU CHAO
- ☐ *KALA*, M.I.A.
- ☐ *AFRIKI*, HABIB KOITÉ
- ☐ *BOOK OF LIFE*, I WAYNE
- ☐ *SUPER TARANTA!*, GOGOL BORDELLO
- ☐ *WRITE-IN VOTE:*

_____

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↓ SEAL/TAPE ↓

↑ SEAL/TAPE ↑

→ CHECK BOXES FOR FAVORITE IN EACH CATEGORY

BEST LIVE ACT

- ☐ DAFT PUNK
- ☐ BEASTIE BOYS
- ☐ THE POLICE
- ☐ VAN HALEN
- ☐ RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE
- ☐ *WRITE-IN VOTE:*

_____

BEST BREAKOUT ARTIST

- ☐ JUSTICE
- ☐ GYM CLASS HEROES
- ☐ AMY WINEHOUSE
- ☐ PLAIN WHITE T'S
- ☐ PETER BJORN AND JOHN
- ☐ *WRITE-IN VOTE:*

_____

BEST REISSUE ALBUM

- ☐ *THE SONG REMAINS THE SAME,* LED ZEPPELIN
- ☐ SLY AND THE FAMILY STONE CATALOG
- ☐ JOY DIVISION CATALOG
- ☐ THE DOORS CATALOG
- ☐ *COLOSSAL YOUTH,* YOUNG MARBLE GIANTS
- ☐ *WRITE-IN VOTE:*

_____

↓ FOLD HERE ↓

HALL OF FAME

☐ FATS DOMINO

The Lower Ninth Ward's most famous resident took New Orleans R&B and made it mainstream. Over the past half century Domino has contributed countless hits, including "Blue Monday" and "Ain't That a Shame." Those and many more were compiled this year on *Greatest Hits: Walking to New Orleans*. His rollicking piano and rousing voice sound as good today as they did way back when. Could Domino be the true father of rock?

☐ THE POLICE

The most successful postpunk band–slowing down the frenetic ticking guitars of the era with a kind dose of riddim–finally buried the hatchet this year, to the delight of millions of fans still missing that magic mixture in Sting's solo career.

☐ BEE GEES

Though the 30th anniversary of *Saturday Night Fever* is the excuse to listen to the band's commercial peak–"Stayin' Alive" and "How Deep Is Your Love"–recent reissues also remind us of the Gibb brothers' 1960s output. Songs like "Massachusetts" made them the Australian Beatles.

☐ JEFFERSON AIRPLANE

It would be impossible to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Summer of Love without San Francisco's most thrilling band. From the Grace Slick showpieces "White Rabbit" and "Somebody to Love" to the psychedelic guitar excursions and political sloganeering, this band was the shit.

☐ SONIC YOUTH

These sonic experimentalists virtually created the New York avant-garde scene. Starting with shrieking walls of detuned guitar and evolving into propulsive pop and vocal hooks wrung out of sheets of noise, the downtown quartet opened the doors of perception for Dinosaur Jr., Nirvana, Pixies and countless others.

☐ WRITE-IN VOTE: _____

↑ FOLD HERE ↑

AUSTIN POWER

INDIE HEROES SPOON OFFER TEXAS-SIZE GRANDEUR

This year the Austin band SPOON released its sixth album, a gorgeous *whoosh* of piano and guitar that both indie kids and classic rockers can agree on. The record's top 10 debut successfully built on the musical and critical momentum that has been picking up since 2002's *Kill the Moonlight*. We caught up with frontman Britt Daniel to discuss the new LP, one of our favorites of 2007.

PLAYBOY: The title of the album is *Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga*. Are you tired of answering questions about it?

DANIEL: No. That's what you have to do when you have one of the world's great titles. The way it came about is there's a song on the record called "The Ghost of You Lingers." Before it had a title or full words, we were referring to it as "Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga" because that's sort of what it sounds like. We always got a kick out of saying that title. Once I'd renamed it with more recognizable English words, everybody was a little disappointed. So we pulled that one out again.

PLAYBOY: What makes this LP different from your previous ones?

DANIEL: It's louder. When records were made for vinyl they were mastered without tons of low end and bass because if they put too much bass on, the needle would jump and your record player would hum. It just didn't work with that kind of technology. That's the way I like records to sound. If you listen to *Back in Black*, *Led Zeppelin IV* and *1999*, by Prince, they have solid, tight low ends. This is the first time we've had a record that sounds like that.

PLAYBOY: You have a tradition of going away by yourself to write an album before you start recording. Where did you hide this time?

DANIEL: I moved to Portland, Oregon, which allowed for a lot of time because I don't know many people up here. I went to Connecticut for a summer before *Kill the Moonlight*, and I went to Galveston before *Gimme Fiction*. I always get to a stage where I'm not getting as much done as I'd like and I need to do some concentrated work. A good way to do that is to go somewhere isolated.

PLAYBOY: That sounds intense. What happens if the songs still don't flow?

DANIEL: Someone once said to me that creativity likes to find you working. If you put yourself in that situation, more stuff will happen than if you're just doing whatever you do and hoping something comes to you. Of course, sometimes it comes to you, sometimes it doesn't. If it doesn't, you can get frustrated. I've learned the best thing to do is go watch a movie, get some Mexican food or have an iced tea, and then come back and listen and work on it again.

PLAYBOY: You've been in Oregon for two years. Do you miss anything about home?

DANIEL: The food and Christmastime weather.

NO I.AM IN TEAM

MAIN PEA LEAVES THE POD FOR SOLO LP

The world-conquering BLACK EYED PEAS have already spawned a hit solo act in Fergie. Now the band's mastermind, Will.i.am, is stepping out with his own album, *Songs About Girls*. Though he's contributed to recordings by a who's who of today's biggest stars—including Busta Rhymes, Justin Timberlake, the Game and Lupe Fiasco—his new LP is refreshingly light on guests, fostering the feel of a proper album.

PLAYBOY: Most Black Eyed Peas fans who know you for your rapping skills will probably be surprised by how much you sing on this disc. When did you discover you could sing?

WILL.I.AM: I've always sung my melodies to myself, but I had other people sing them on the records. Macy Gray always cheered me on to sing, and when I did a song called "A Dream" with Common last year, he told me the same thing. Those people gave me the confidence to actually put out records that I sing on.

PLAYBOY: Snoop is the only guest on this album. Before starting, did you make a conscious decision to limit the number of collaborators?

WILL.I.AM: I didn't want any guests. I've been collaborating with the Black Eyed Peas for 12 years. I wanted it to be a solo project on which I step out as a solo artist and not just as a producer-rapper dude who has a lot of friends.

PLAYBOY: The album tells the story of the end of your long-term relationship with your girlfriend. Was the emotional level of the songs a reason to limit the guests?

WILL.I.AM: That's the main reason. I didn't want to say, "Yo, Nas, I need you to spit a verse about my girl cheating on me, and I need you to gimme 16 about when I cheated on my girl and got caught." That ain't the cool thing.

PLAYBOY: Is it harder to write an emotional song like "Over" or a catchy party tune like "The Donque Song"?

WILL.I.AM: It was hard to write "Over" because that relationship was over four years ago. To remember what I felt like was tough. The hardest thing was to have an album full of emotional songs like "Over" and "Heartbreaker" and balance it with fun songs. "I Got It From My Mama" is a fun track, but it also describes what I would go through when a girl and I would break up and I would go out with my homies. If I were to score on those nights, it would sound like "The Donque Song" and "I Got It From My Mama," where you're just spitting to chicks. The best way to get over a broken heart is to go jibbing.

PLAYBOY: You've played shows all over the world. Do you have to change your lyrics in any countries?

WILL.I.AM: In China the minister of culture reads your lyrics before you perform. But the Chinese let us play "Let's Get Retarded" and "My Humps." I guess they don't know what "My Humps" means.

MIRANDA WRITES

SONG CRAFT FUELS HER CONTINUING RISE

MIRANDA LAMBERT is a country-music prodigy. After making a splash in her home state of Texas while still a teenager, she placed third in USA Network's *Nashville Star* competition, paving the way for what ultimately became her platinum debut album, *Kerosene*, released in 2005. Besides earning a Grammy nomination, she has received additional props from industry insiders for writing most of her own songs. This year she released the follow-up, again mostly self-written, and has become an outright sensation—praised for her songwriting, stage presence and musical integrity.

PLAYBOY: When you're out with your girlfriends, what's one song you have to dance to?

LAMBERT: "Bootylicious" by Destiny's Child. Anything by Beyoncé, really. I love her. I've been to two of her shows. We're on the same record label, but I haven't met her yet.

PLAYBOY: Your album is called *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. Are men afraid of you?

LAMBERT: Honestly, I don't think so, but I could be wrong. I don't notice. Part of me hopes they are.

PLAYBOY: You grew up in Lindale, Texas, population 4,300. What's a typical Saturday night like in Lindale?

LAMBERT: For me, I just sit on my deck and have a beer. I live right on the lake. On a typical Saturday the town shuts down around 10 o'clock. If you don't have a party to go to, you're pretty much done for the evening.

PLAYBOY: What's the worst hangover you've had this year?

LAMBERT: When I was on tour with Dierks Bentley and the Randy Rogers Band, I went to an afterparty, and no one was there to tell me not to have that sixth Jäger bomb. The next day was a really bad one.

PLAYBOY: Do you have a Texas hangover remedy we should know about?

LAMBERT: A greasy cheeseburger and some sweet tea. That always works for me.

PLAYBOY: Do you like hunting?

LAMBERT: I like hunting deer. I shot a deer that scored a 145 last year. I shot it with my bow. I also own a rifle and a couple of shotguns and pistols. I go hunting with my dad and my boyfriend—the men in my life. My mom doesn't hunt, but she likes to cook. We bring home the meat, and she makes it taste delicious.

DJ REKHA

She's New York's premiere spinner of *bhangra*, *baile* and other far-flung beats. Now the woman who helped launch M.I.A. in the U.S. has applied her tastemaking to a new mix tape called *Basement Bhangra*. We asked her to describe her top five floor fillers. "Jimmy," by M.I.A.: "Classic 1970s Bollywood, lyrically updated in true M.I.A. style." "Solta o Frango," by Bonde do Role: "Fun, digestible, the ultimate party music." "LDN (Warbox remix)," by Lily Allen: "Maybe it's the rewinds, dancehall vocal drops and distant fog horns, or maybe because it's about London, my birthplace and second-favorite city, but I love this." "#1 Punjabi," by Circus Amok Band: "Quirky meets irreverent; this makes you want to join the circus." "Basement Bhangra Anthem," by DJ Rekha: "Personal plugs aside, I got to kick it with Wyclef in the studio for this."

HOT TUNES

NEW SOUNDS AND RECENT HIDDEN GEMS

1. **"TROUBLED SON,"** WORKING FOR A NUCLEAR FREE CITY
   Sludgy neo-baggy with a more sinister edge than vintage Madchester.
2. **"FIGHT & KISS,"** WE ARE WOLVES
   Buzz-saw electronics, guitars and shout-along vocals from French Canadians.
3. **"TAKE ME TO THE RIOT,"** STARS
   If Coldplay were still cool, the result would sound like this.
4. **"FLUNKY FOR YOUR LOVE,"** PIECES OF PEACE
   Some 1970s supafunk from the reissue of the band's debut album.
5. **"WE NEED LOVE,"** HARD-FI
   A swaggering rock do-over of Donna Summer's "I Feel Love."
6. **"COURAGE,"** TALKING DRUMS
   Tom Tom Club–like cut from Sonar Kollektiv's 1980s electro compilation.
7. **"ENDLESS,"** DAVE GAHAN
   Throbbing, aching track from affecting solo LP by the voice of Depeche Mode.
8. **"KILL THE DIRECTOR,"** THE WOMBATS
   For a gurgling electro-wave version of this jittery Brit hit, get the CSS remix.
9. **"SEE EMILY PLAY,"** PINK FLOYD
   The blueprint of psych-pop from *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* reissue.
10. **"SPOOKY,"** CLASSICS IV
    Rare soft-rock hit with Zombies groove on *American Bandstand* boxed set.
11. **"I AM A LADY,"** HER MAJESTY'S SOUND
    Slinky cocktail-friendly breakbeat from Petrol's *Burlesque* sampler.
12. **"IT'S THE BEAT,"** SIMIAN MOBILE DISCO
    Analog synth-pop with brassy-dame vocals from thoroughly fun LP.
13. **"THE OPPOSITE OF HALLELUJAH,"** JENS LEKMAN
    Bedroom chamber-pop perfection from brooding Swede's great second album.
14. **"RESCUE TEAM,"** JOHNOSSI
    Young Stockholm duo rocks out with equal parts verve and melody.
15. **"KNIGHTS,"** CRYSTAL CASTLES
    From the latest Kitsuné Maison collection, this is washed-out, buzzing electro.
16. **"FIND WHAT YOU GET,"** BANG GANG
    Fragile homegrown indie showcased on this year's Iceland Airwaves festival comp.
17. **"RUN INTO FLOWERS,"** M83
    Check out the "Midnight Fuck" remix from volume four of the Standard series.
18. **"ROCKLAND,"** TOMC3 & PRINCE PO
    Po and guest Del tha Funkee Homosapien flow over a nice Bay Area beat.
19. **"FRIENDS,"** WEEN
    Usual bonkers Ween stuff: This track is Ziggy Stardust doing the macarena.
20. **"RICH WOMAN,"** ROBERT PLANT & ALISON KRAUSS
    Haunting harmonies and spooky guitars on this shockingly good record.

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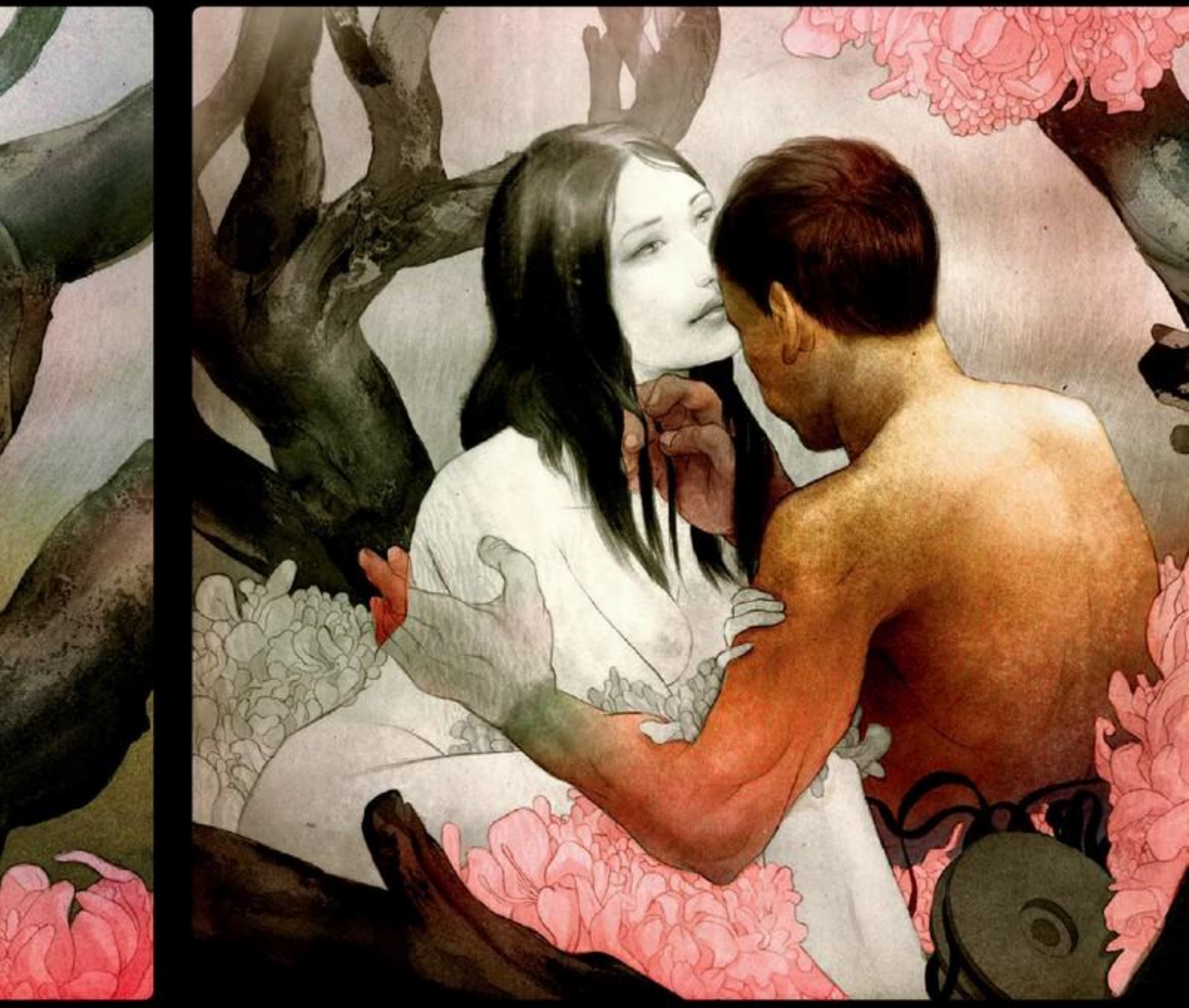


TRULY, MADLY, DEEPLY (MOSTLY MADLY)

JIM LOVES LAUREN, MAUREEN LOVES JULIETTE, SHERMAN LOVES AMY, AND PAULA LOVES FRANCHOT. FOUR CELEBRATED NOVELISTS EXPRESS THEIR DEVOTION TO THE SINGULAR ICONS WHO INSPIRE LOVE AND LUST, DISORIENTATION AND DELIVERANCE

LAUREN HUTTON'S ABC'S BY JIM HARRISON

When you hear that banal old line "Take my hand, I'm a stranger in paradise," it occurs to you that such emotions are rarely accessible. Romantic gullibility is, however, characteristic of songwriters and poets, and I happen to be, among other things, one of the latter. The onset of a crush or infatuation is a nonmilitary surge, a rather blowsy tsunami in the brainpan so that the soul develops twinkle toes, the heart enlarges to the size of the Pacific Rim. If you're married, it is far safer if the object of desire is a photo in a magazine, or on the silver screen, rather than within the somewhat rigid confines of your actual life.

You wonder how pheromones can emerge from the pages of a magazine and infect the mind of the viewer? It's not just me who has experienced this affliction. Early in my mediocre screenwriting career I dined several times with Orson Welles in Patrick Terrail's Ma Maison in Hollywood. Over the usual caviar, a whole Norwegian poached salmon, a leg of lamb and several French Premiers Grand Crus, I asked him if the Rita Hayworth stories were true. Of course. He told me he was in Brazil and had seen the fabulous photo of Rita on the cover of *Life* magazine, jumped the next plane to Los Angeles and soon married her. How heroic, though I was cynical enough to question whether it was really "the next plane." Didn't he have business in Rio to tidy up? In any event, the marriage was a "disaster." Orson also warned me never to fall in love with a hatcheck girl, valuable advice, though I never met one.

I've had a number of such experiences of varying intensity.

ILLUSTRATION BY SAM WEBER

Lucky for me I'm half Swede and Swedes are slow studies, brooders. They're more likely to walk in a rainy forest for a month and then miss the next plane because they tried to expunge their perilous emotions with herring and aquavit.

After boyish infatuations with Deanna Durbin and Jeanne Crain (*State Fair*), Deborah Kerr (tied to the stake in a negligee in *Quo Vadis*), Ava Gardner (*The Barefoot Contessa*), Cyd Charisse (kicking sky-high in *Deep in My Heart*), I hit a vacuum for a while before Lee Remick twirling her baton in *A Face in the Crowd* hit me hard below the belt.

There was a hiatus for a time in my wanton but abstract affections because of a very happy marriage sexually and the general busyness of my life. I had spent two mostly miserable years as a poet, a writer of reviews for *The New York Times Book Review*, an administrator of an English department at Stony Brook University on Long Island. I simply didn't have time to let the devil into my life until we moved to northern Michigan on the grace of two grants and I had my first extended leisure since I began working at the age of 12. We lived in an idyllic stone farmhouse for 75 bucks a month on a hill overlooking Lake Michigan. I was finding it hard to write in a state of total freedom, and one idle summer morning, probably with a hangover, I picked up my wife's *Vogue* and stared long and hard at a Richard Avedon display of a young model named Lauren Hutton. It was shot in the Bahamas, and in one photo I seem to remember Lauren was on her tummy reading Ezra Pound's *ABC of Reading*, one of my favorite books at the time. For some strange reason asses can be more memorable than books and to be frank her butt was extremely bare. There was the "involuntary shudder" in my body that we read about in novels but never actually get to feel. It was akin to getting suckered into peeing on an electric fence in my farmboy childhood. Since I was a literary type, I doubtless thought of Lucrezia Borgia or the nudes of Botticelli or Modigliani to try to raise lust, the brain's hangnail, to higher ground. Far later in life I learned that male chimps will give up lunch to look at photos of female chimp butts, but at the time I tended to want desire to be somehow connected to the English Romantic movement. I'm sure my unruly but silky hair was sweating as I turned and re-turned the page. This was clearly the finest flower of womankind, as they say.

In my heroic posturing as a young American poet of note, I naturally wrote her a letter, and she wrote back saying, "You sure can turn a girl's head with that typewriter." I wrote again but received no answer. A certain slippage entered my fantasy, which, after all, was mostly literary. Would I have been so awestruck had she been reading *Peyton Place* rather than Ezra Pound? Also, having lost my left eye to an angry girl wielding a broken bottle at the age of seven, I had lost any impulse to push myself on a woman. Pheromones again. They either like you or they don't. Stalkers have always been a mystery to me. Why pursue a woman unless she gives you some sort of welcome sign? And my somewhat unstable mind was distressed one morning remembering the night's dream wherein Lauren lived in a house on a small causeway out in a harbor somewhere. I was anyway recovering from a severe back injury and writing a novel, having determined that the few hundred bucks in royalties delivered by my books of poems wouldn't support my family.

Our fantasy neurons can burn out, but they can also enliven themselves, sort of like the attempt to bring back the two-dollar bill, or the idea that chapters of life don't close but smear and blur themselves into the next. About half a dozen years after the "Pure Poet in Northern Michigan" chapter, I was in Key West tarpon fishing and made friends with Phil Clark, about whom Jimmy Buffett wrote his song "A Pirate Looks at 40." These tarpon trips lacked wisdom, as drugs, booze and other nonsense were integrally woven into our sporting life. Clark was a wonderfully *raffiné* character involved in commercial fishing and smuggling, not a unique combination of vocations in the Keys in those days. Clark told me that when he lived in New York City he had roomed with Lauren Hutton, though they weren't romantically connected. That didn't quell my hot jealousy as I imagined them passing each other in and out of the shower. I think at the time Lauren worked briefly at the Playboy Club.

Half a dozen years later I was in Hollywood as an accidentally successful screenwriter, though it was some years before my mediocrity at this difficult form would be revealed. While in Hollywood, when not taking meetings I'd stay with Jack Nicholson. When I brought up Lauren Hutton he said that she was utterly lovely but tough and that he had once sent her roses but she had sent them back. He also warned me that while actors are usually three people, actresses are always at least five.

My memories of my Hollywood years are, not surprisingly, blurred, as the 1980s were not a time of rehab. I somehow managed to get an informal date with Lauren at an intensely private club, On the Rox, which was up above the Roxy Theatre and where one would run into a sparse crowd of people like *(continued on page 180)*

THERE WAS THE "INVOLUNTARY SHUDDER" IN MY BODY THAT WE READ ABOUT IN NOVELS BUT NEVER ACTUALLY GET TO FEEL.

Juliette Binoche in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being.*

"It's not one of your best drawings, Mr. Lautrec. I can't give you more than a blow job."

Crazy for Kim

The savvy star power of Kim Kardashian

By DAVID HOCHMAN

If you think being famous for being famous doesn't require talent, you've obviously never stayed up all night with Kim Kardashian. One moment she's hanging around Hollywood with her BFF, Paris Hilton, and the next she's hosting *the* party after the party before the afterparty in Malibu. All this with grace and aplomb. Kim sets the standard for a new type of savvy star power. She may not have a movie, an album or a line of products to hype, but that doesn't stop her from flaunting everything she's got: bubbly charm, exotic good looks (she's of Armenian descent) and sex appeal that keeps the paparazzi flashing till dawn.

"It's bizarre to me," Kim says with a laugh when asked about her celebrity status. She is stretched out in a sundress on a velvety sofa in her Beverly Hills apartment, coyly hugging an expensive-looking pillow to her chest. A diamond-studded ring glitters on her left middle toe. "I'm a girl who likes to go out with my family and girlfriends and have a good time," the 27-year-old says. "And somehow that has become a fascination for people."

Partly it's the crowd Kim hangs with. Having grown up in Beverly Hills in a well-known family, she was born famous by association. She's the daughter of the late Robert Kardashian, one of O.J. Simpson's high-profile trial lawyers, and the stepdaughter of 1976 Olympic gold medalist Bruce Jenner. At 14 she had her birthday party at family friend Michael Jackson's Neverland Ranch. Her first boyfriend was Tito Jackson's son. These days, when Kim's not strolling the red carpet with Paris, whom she's known since preschool, she's often spotted with friends like the Pussycat Dolls, Nicole Richie, Lindsay Lohan and Serena Williams. Even an evening out with Kim's siblings is a cause célèbre. She has nine brothers and sisters—three full siblings as well as two half sisters, three stepbrothers and one stepsister from Jenner. "We're like our own version of *Entourage*," Kim says, which explains why this fall E! launched a reality series about her family, *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, which premiered in mid-October. "Hopefully, the show will put an end to the misconceptions everybody has about us Hollywood kids," she says. "It's not like we're aliens or something. We're not. We do everything everybody else does. We just do it a little splashier."

Another thing that has kept Kim's name in the gossip columns: her romantic life. Although she's been linked with a number of famous *(text concluded on page 176)*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HYPE WILLIAMS AND STEPHEN WAYDA

A regular night out for Kim Kardashian means hitting Hollywood hot spots with some of Tinseltown's sexiest young things. Below, from left: Kim strikes a pose with best friend Paris Hilton; on the set of her new E! reality show, *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*; with Melody Thornton of the Pussycat Dolls and Aubrey O'Day of Danity Kane; vamping with the lovely Lindsay Lohan.

See more of Kim at cyber.playboy.com.

INTERCOURSE

(continued from page 102)

If I do actually look at Elvis Presley's naked body, how will I ever go on with the rest of my life?

Marcus Antonius, 41, general and member of Rome's ruling triumvirate
Cleopatra VII, 29, queen of Egypt

on her royal barge in the river Cydnus at Tarsus, 41 B.C.

Marcus: the sound of flutes and harps and lyres and, in their pausing, the sound of water lapping at the barge and I am an ambitious man and I am a man of battle and my head always has sounds on its horizon—the clanging of swords and the grunting of men and even, to an ear attuned to it, the sucking sound of sword in flesh, and this sound is the same, inside me and out: that soft sucking sound, now beneath me, my mansword and the flesh of a queen, but these other sounds are in me, as well, of the music and of the river in this floating world, where she waited for me tonight amidst a thousand torches, beneath a golden canopy, the queen reclining on her couch draped in an azure peplos fallen off her shoulder to bare her breasts, her hair braided all about her head, she was the very vision of Venus, opening wide for Marcus Antonius, and I am an ambitious man and I can overcome Octavian and rule Rome and perhaps I will, but what higher ambition is there than to fuck a goddess and I might well choose to float on her river forever in peace

Cleopatra: how simple it was, how nakedly alluring, me rolled into a carpet like the womb and I rolled out with no sounding of trumpets no scuffle of subjects going prostrate and with no perfumes or jewels or silks upon me but I rolled in a thin swaddling of linen as a newborn child onto the floor and the great Julius Caesar rose in surprise from his chair and my breasts had gone bare and my loins as well and I very slowly covered them and spun and folded my legs under me and I lifted my face to him and it began, and Caesar touched me quite gently—unlike this stone-fingered Antony—and he gave me my throne over my brother, who he had drowned in the Nile, and my sister, who he had pursued into exile in the temple at Ephesus, and he took me to his Rome where he exalted me, and then he died on my behalf on the steps of the Forum, and now with riches and pomp and music it begins again, and though this one touches me roughly, it will do, and the first thing I will ask of him is that he kill my sister

Elvis Presley, 42, singer
Holly Singleton, 20, admirer

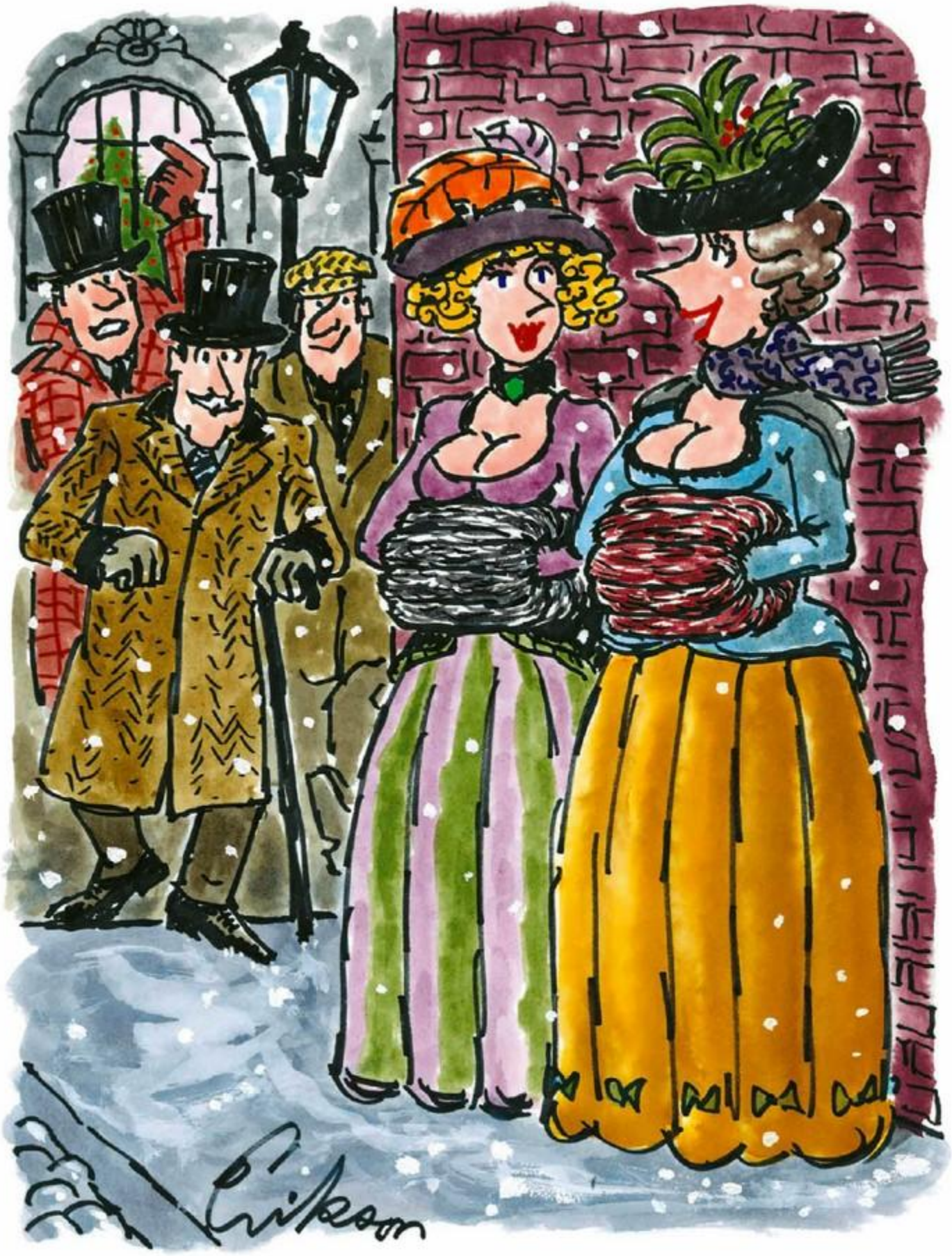
in his dressing room at the Market Square Arena, Indianapolis, Indiana, after what would be his last public performance, June 26, 1977

Holly: he was singing all in white in this kind of jumpsuit with a big golden something on him, like the sun, but it was split in half by his bare chest and it was about driving me crazy to see that, and now listen to me, I'm naked with him and I should be memorizing his body but instead I'm trying to remember him from the stage even though he's right here with me in his own private dressing room and he's touching me and I can look at what I've always dreamed about seeing but I can't stop *thinking* about seeing him instead of actually opening my darn eyes and *seeing*, like what if you had 10 minutes with Jesus and you kept thinking *Wow here I am with Jesus, Wow God's chosen son is sitting right in front of me* instead of going *Jesus, is it okay to use my tongue when I kiss my boyfriend* and *Please Jesus, my mama's about driving me crazy with her criticism, is it dishonoring her to tell her to stop even if I don't actually say "shut up"* and look what I'm doing now, I'm thinking about talking to Jesus when Elvis is right here, and my head is so full of stupid thoughts that I'm not even seeing him, and even thinking about how my thoughts are stupid is stupid because it's still more of not seeing him, but really, if I do see him, if I do actually look at Elvis Presley's naked body, how will I ever go on with the rest of my life

Elvis: you're how it used to be, pretty lady, me singing like it's just for some new girl in the front row, but all this goes way back, Mama and me sitting in chairs in the little patch of grass at the Lauderdale Courts and she's been waiting up for me and she's past being mad, she knows I been on Beale Street, at dusk I went on and walked out of Pinchgut and down Lauderdale to Beale, and like I do, I'm moving from door to door at the clubs, listening, and somewhere along the way somebody who knew to see me finally says *Let that white boy in* and I go in trembling and it's Arthur Crudup singing and he is singing to me and he is singing about me, this colored man with his dark angel voice who knows every pain in the world, and I come back and before Mama can say anything I sit down alongside her, and behind us and above us there's voices shouting at each other and there's a dog barking somewhere and there's a woman's crying, too, coming from a window and a boat whistle from the river and I lean to Mama and I touch her arm, and this is just for her, and though I'm feeling already that someday I'll do this for everybody and I'll do it with a beat and I'll move my body to the life of it, for now I sing just to her, real soft and slow *That's all right now, Mama, anyway you do*

My breasts had gone bare and my loins as well and I very slowly covered them and spun and folded my legs under me and I lifted my face to him and it began

Names, places, characters and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictionally.



"These muffs Santa brought us seem to be attracting all the muff divers."

MAILER *(continued from page 80)*

If God is All-Powerful, then how can you begin to explain the monstrosities of modern history?

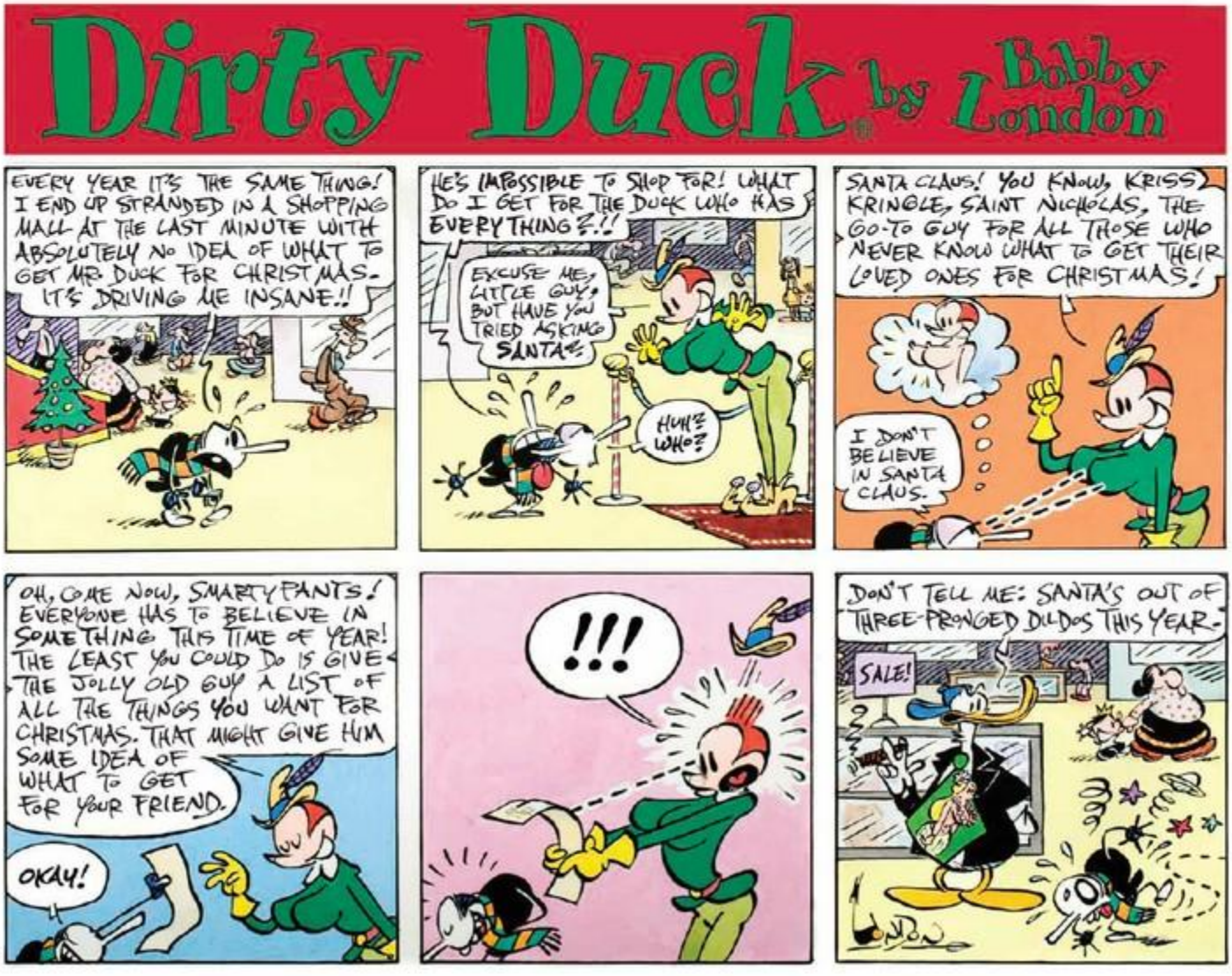
enter our senses, make us feel we are having a godly emotion, when in fact we are being inspired by the Devil.

So I hope I never construct an ethic by offering a few bones. The worst to be said about Fundamentalism is that it reduces people to the reflexes of a good dog. If a good dog is upset, give it a treat.

Fundamentalism is comfortable.
It's comfortable, but it is limiting. I keep going back to Kierkegaard, who, for my money, was probably the most profound Christian. He searched into the complexity of our relation not only to divinity but to diabolism as well. He knew that we must take nothing for granted in the moral firmament. We cannot kneel forever before the neon sign that purports to be God's mystery: "Don't ask, just obey!"

Fundamentalists, beneath everything else, feel the same fears that existential thinkers suffer—that the whole thing can come to an end. Fundamentalists look to alleviate that fear by way of what I would call their desperate belief that it's "God's will" and at the end they will be transported to Heaven. Well, once again, this supposes that God is All-Good and All-Powerful and will carry the righteous right up there. Of course, that offers nothing to the idiocies of human history, particularly that the more we develop as humans, the worse we are able to treat one another. Why? Because we now have the power to destroy one another at higher, more unfeeling levels. This can be epitomized again and again by repeating the familiar example I take from the concentration camps—telling poor wretches that they're going to have a shower to get rid of lice, and instead they die with a curse in their hearts. That's more hideous, in a certain sense, than dropping a bomb on 100,000 people—on people you know nothing about. And yet you have Fundamentalists carrying on about abortion, speaking of it as thwarting God's will. What does it have to do with God's will if you kill 1,000 people in one minute with gas? Or destroy hundreds of thousands in an instant of atomic man-made lightning from the sky? What does that do to God's will?

We might assume that God, like us, is doing the best that can be done under the circumstances. God is our Creator. God put us here. We are God's artistic vision, we are God's children, if you will, and it's not a good parent who looks always to control the child. The mark of a good parent is that he or she can take joy in the moment when a developing child begins to outstrip the parent. God is immensely powerful but is *not* All-Powerful. God is powerful enough to give us lightning and thunder and extraordinary sunsets, incredible moments where we appreciate God's sense of beauty. But if God is All-Powerful, then how can you begin to explain the monstrosities of modern history? There are theological arguments by great theologians that these horrors are to test us. But this reduces



our concept of God to a stage director who says, "Let the actors follow the script. Do not give them access to the playwright."

In one of our earlier conversations, you said humans were created by someone or something not unlike ourselves. So we are then, in some way, created in the image of God?
Yes. I believe that.

Doesn't that suggest we are more good than evil?
Whether it's 50–50, 60–40, 70–30, the odds change in each of us because there's an intense war that goes on forever, not only between God and the Devil but—I've said this before—God and the Devil as they war within us. We make our own bargains with Them. God and the Devil do not have the resources to be in complete control of us all the time. It isn't as if we walk through a normal day, and there's God on one shoulder and the Devil on the other—not at all. They come to us when we attract their attention, because it affects Their interest as well as ours.

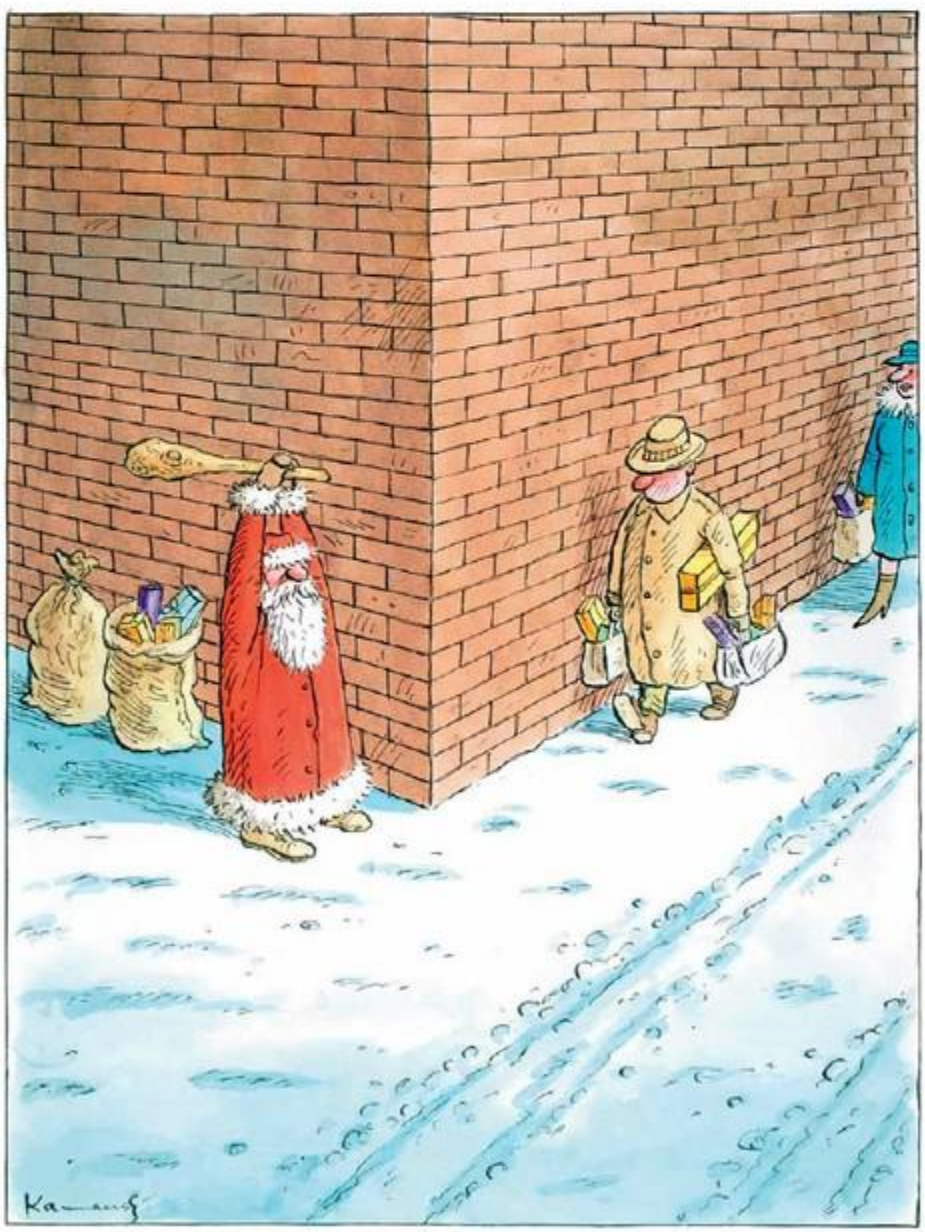
What I use as the notion behind these assumptions that divine energy is analogous to human energy—it is not inexhaustible. God and the Devil are each obliged to manage their own economies of energy, which is to say that they will give more attention to certain elements of human behavior than to others. Very often, they withdraw from certain people. Too much is being given, too little is coming back.

Given this supposition, I feel more ready to make an approach to the question of ethics. It must be obvious in all I've said so far that I not only am an existentialist but would go so far as to say that we do not know our nature. We only find out about ourselves as we proceed through life. And as we do, we open more questions.

Jean Malaquais once made a splendid remark—at least for me—during the course of a lecture. He was a brilliant lecturer, and in the middle of a verbal flight—this was at the New School—some kid said bitterly, "You never give us answers. You only pose questions." And Jean stopped in the full flight of his rhetoric and replied, "There are no answers. There are only questions."

The point is that the purpose of life may be to find higher and better questions. Why? Because what I believe—this is wholly speculative but important to me—is that we are here as God's work, here to influence His future as well as ours. We are God's expression, and not all artworks are successful.

What I'm offering to people as an ethic is to have the honor to live with confusion. Live in the depths of confusion with the knowledge back of that, the certainty back of that—or the belief, the hope, the faith, whatever you wish to call it—that there is a purpose to it all, that it is not absurd, that we are all engaged in a vast cosmic war and God needs us. That doesn't mean we can help God by establishing a set of principles to live by. We can't. Why not? Because the principles vary. The cruelest obstacle to creating one's own ethic is that no principle is incorruptible. Indeed, to cleave to a principle is to corrupt oneself. To shift from one principle to another can, however, be promiscuous. Life is not simple. Ethics are almost incomprehensible, but they exist. There is a substratum of moderate, quiet, good feeling. Generally, if I'm doing things in such a way that the sum of all my actions at the moment seems to be feasible and responsible and decent, that certainly gives me a better feeling than if I am uneasy, dissatisfied with myself and not liking myself.



So it isn't so much that you have no ethical system but one that cannot be abstracted nor carved on tablets for people to carry around and consult whenever they have to make a decision. Life is always more complicated than any rule that can be laid down.
What I'm asking for.... This is an odd analogy, but not entirely. There are certain people who worship sex, good sex. I might be one of them. What I've noticed about good sex, when it's really good, is the extreme sensitivity with which you proceed. At a given moment, it's a creative dance. There is such a thing as a pure act of love when every moment is distinctive and lovely and fine. That does happen. For most people, it happens so rarely that they remember it—and then remember it and remember it. A sense of perfection does live in our concept of sex.

In the same way, sometimes, for short periods in our lives, I think there's an analogous sense of perfection to all sorts of basic emotions—in love, in nurture, in caring for people, in grieving, in mourning. It's very hard to mourn,

mourn openly and honestly. Mourning is an element in people's lives that can be duplicitous, even ugly. Take a wife who's been married to a man for 40 years—and in her mourning, what if she detects a secret spot of glee? "That selfish bastard is finally gone." So mourning can be shocking for people because they discover sides of themselves they never knew existed—or the reverse.

I remember something else you said about getting close to yourself: "If you dig deep enough into yourself, you're going to come out your asshole.
[N.M. laughs]
In other words, yes, there are doors, and you must open many of those doors, and the ensuing doors within doors, but every once in a while you want to be careful about what you open.
Well, of course you have to be careful about certain doors. Anyone who flings everything ajar at once would be blown away. A mighty change could rage through all the rooms in your psyche. One of the most jealously self-protective elements in human nature may be to protect oneself from one's own dark and barricaded corners.

So I don't think it's a real problem that we're going to open, by mistake, *all* the doors at once—we don't. We can't. What I meant by the closer you get to yourself, the closer you are to coming out of your own asshole has to do with something I'd like to attach to this discussion concerning the nature of defecation, shit and waste. It may be worth getting into. As a small premise, think of people who are terribly prudish about evacuation. They don't want to think about it, don't talk about it, it's beneath them, they hope it is terribly far away from them. I'd say, ethically speaking, that's not a comfortable way to be. Far better that when you're sitting on the throne—parenthetically, it's interesting that we have that metaphor, "the throne," precisely for the toilet—when you're sitting on the throne, you do well to be regal about it and enjoy the sniffs of your own waste. Smell your own shit and decide for yourself if you're a little more healthy or a little more unhealthy than you thought you were the last time you sat down. That's part of being close to yourself. You take this notion that what comes out of you may be unpleasant, but it is certainly real. It can be the nearest we come to a fact.

In your view, is there any merit or value in the holy books of the great religions, or do you think they should be seen as historical artifacts, quaint, useless curiosities?
No, no.

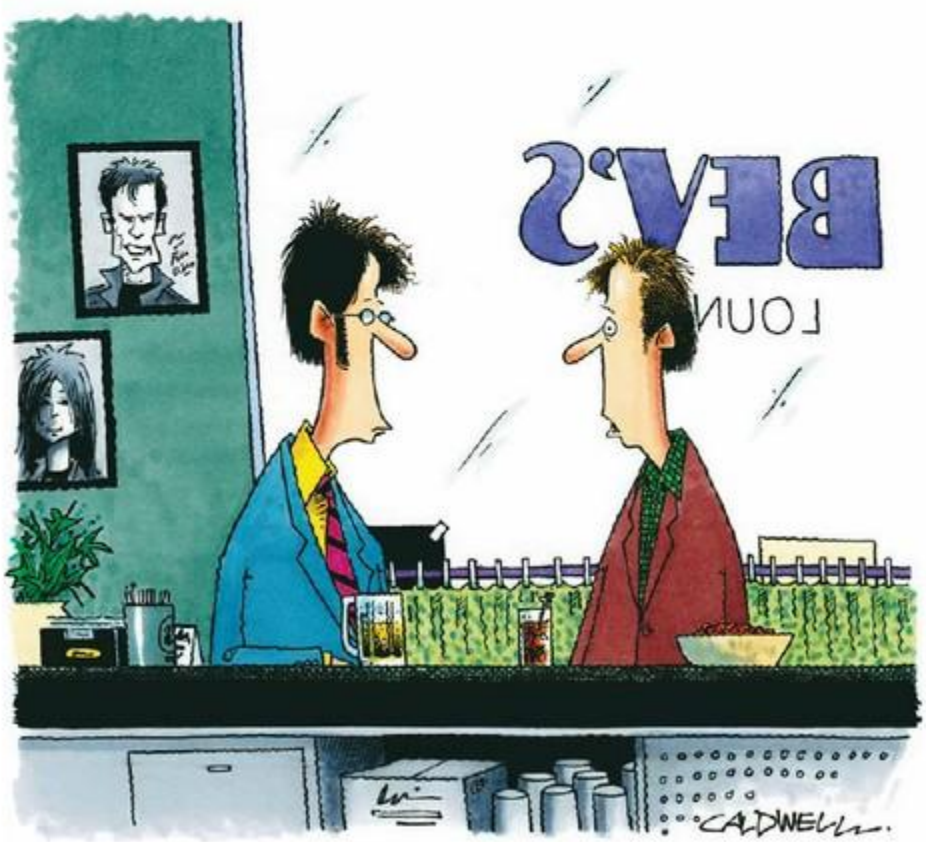
What is their use, then?
Well, if they're seen as general principles rather than as absolute dicta, they can be of great use. The Ten Commandments—most of us do react within the framework of those 10 injunctions. The point is not to build up an inner sense of self-righteousness—"I obey the Ten Commandments, and therefore I am nearer to God." No, they are crude guides. "Do not kill." Well, yes, do not kill. Does that mean you have to piss in your pants if you have a gun in your hand and you're face-to-face with Adolf Hitler in 1941? No, you kill him. At that point, I would not consider "do not kill" an absolute command.

So you're not interested in jettisoning the great holy books of the world; you just want to qualify them.
Not qualify. I want us to cease looking upon them slavishly. Once one becomes a peon to any part of one's mind, one is then open to the dark side of the moon, which is mass destruction.

[I would like to see] more readiness for humans to accept the heroic demand that they stop leaning on God, stop relying on God and start realizing that God's needs could be greater than ours, God's woes more profound than our own. God's sense of failure may be so deep as to mock our sense of failure. God, I believe, is, at present, far from fulfilling His own vision. He is mired in our corporate promotions all over the globe, our superhighways, our plastic, our threats of nuclear warfare, our heartless, arrogant ethnic wars, our terrorism, our spread of pollution all over His environment. How can God's sorrow not be immeasurably greater than ours?

Rely too much on God, and we are comparable to a tremendously selfish child who drives a parent into exhaustion, deadens the parent through endless demands. "Save me! God, please, can I have that beautiful dress I want for the high school prom? Thank you, God, deliver it to me, God." [*pause*] "If you don't, God, I'll be angry at you" is the underlying element in so many of the prayers. Or the abject beseechment—"God, have pity on me, I'm a poor worm."

I think we become a hint more heroic if we recognize that we do have to stand on our own. So I can feel a certain respect for atheists. I have huge disagreements with them—the first might be the absolute refusal of a majority to consider the notion of karma for even a moment. Or any kind of Hereafter—their determined intensity that there will be nothing after life. This creates its own sort of trouble. It fortifies the liberal notions that we have to take care of people we know nothing about and enter strange countries and provide them with democracy, whether they desire it or not. Needless to say, Christians have been doing the same for a long time.



"She drives me to drink. But she drives me home, too."

BILL RICHARDSON

(continued from page 76)

or Kerry about ways they might better connect with people?

RICHARDSON: No. I didn't have much contact with them. Once, Kerry and I were campaigning in New Mexico. I said, "Put on this cowboy hat. I think we can get some votes out of this." He said, "Nah, I don't want to." It struck me. I'm not sure he would have gotten more votes, but it would have been a nice gesture in some of the rural areas where he was trounced. My sense is that Kerry was a lot better in smaller groups. I once saw him on a train with a group of Native Americans. He was very good. He did seem aloof at times, but up close he was good. It's one difference I can point out between myself and the other candidates this time: I connect better with ordinary people. My whole theme is that I'm like Bobby Kennedy. He is the politician I admire most.

PLAYBOY: How are you like him?

RICHARDSON: I'm not comparing myself to him, but here's a guy who came from a privileged background, was sincere in his beliefs about doing something, thought big, believed strongly in touching people, talked about human rights and tried to bring the better good out of people. The more I seek this office, the more I admire what he did. The Kennedys always wanted to make the world better. I like politics, but the reason is to do the right thing. You can't do the right thing without having some power, without being elected. Part of retaining that power is helping your friends but also helping good causes. In New Mexico there may be the best macro arguments to put a facility in an urban area; it's more cost-effective. But if I can help a little town and it's not as cost-effective, I'll help the little town. I've done that. So there's a little bit of idealism in me. I'm not a total pragmatist.

PLAYBOY: Some, like Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, were known as policy wonks. Others, like Ronald Reagan, left much of the details to their staffs. What about you?

RICHARDSON: I'm both, I think. I am an intensive reader of briefing books. I am intensively involved in policy in my state. I am very intellectually curious. I've been called somebody who micromanages, who knows everything not just about the policy but the personnel of my state. Am I a policy wonk? Am I as brilliant as Jimmy Carter? No. But do I study issues, do I read my briefing papers? Yes. Do I think of innovative policies myself? Sometimes I do. But I also believe a major part of the presidency is the bully pulpit, building support for what you're trying to do and communicating. As governor, I found I could set the agenda. It's how you change policy. The job is to inspire and motivate the electorate. The presidency is the governorship magnified a hundred times.

PLAYBOY: You have mentioned your meetings with international political leaders several times. Who is the most compelling head of state you have met?

RICHARDSON: Fidel Castro has an enormously powerful intellect and is well informed. He told me he reads every newspaper, sees every morning broadcast and reads prodigiously. He showed me all the books he read. While I have enormous dislike for his policies—especially human rights; he incarcerates everybody who disagrees with him—he is a fascinating character who tries to intimidate you with his intellect. Saddam Hussein, on the other hand, tried to intimidate me with his physical actions. He would try to stare me down. He had a bunch of the Revolutionary Guard around us. He was heavily armed. His gestures were menacing. But through his intellect, Castro would try to destroy every argument I made about why he should take certain steps.

PLAYBOY: Who are the best contemporary American politicians?

RICHARDSON: I've never seen more graceful and natural politicians than Bill Clinton and Henry Cisneros. I never felt I knew more than Clinton did on any subject we ever discussed. Every time he looked at me, I felt I was the most important person who ever existed. He had that hold on people. Cisneros would magnetize a crowd.

PLAYBOY: Who has less than impressed you?

RICHARDSON: I had good relations with Ollie North, Don Imus, Sean Hannity—people you'd think would make me cringe. I find common ground with people. Recently I talked to Trent Lott. I called him after he was elected whip. I don't believe politics should get personal, which is why I think I could be a good president. I can bring people together. I can get Republican support. I believe you can bridge gaps despite enormous philosophical differences.

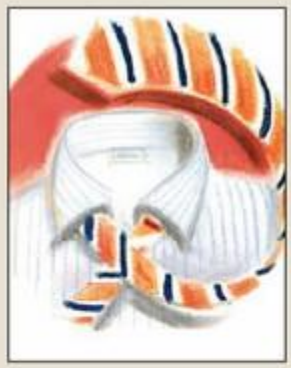
PLAYBOY: American politicians seem terrified of admitting anything negative. Would you tell Americans the truth even if the news were bad?

RICHARDSON: I would. We have for so long practiced the politics of convenience and easy answers—the politics of nonsacrifice—Americans are no longer accustomed to political leaders asking for sacrifice for the common good. In my judgment, this has caused a yearning in Americans for somebody to ask them. They want to be inspired. They want someone who will say, "Look, we've got to make some choices and some tough decisions." I sense there's a yearning for leadership by somebody who'll tell it like it is.

"Should we decorate it with ornaments from my first marriage or from your first marriage?"

WHERE & HOW TO BUY

Below is a list of retailers and manufacturers you can contact for information on where to find this month's merchandise. To buy the apparel and equipment shown on pages 44, 47–52, 110–115, 132–137 and 208–209, check the listings below to find the stores nearest you.



GAMES

Page 44: *Army of Two,* ea.com. *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare,* activision.com. *Haze,* ubi.com. *Manhunt 2,* rockstargames.com. *Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction,* playstation.com. *Rock Band,* ea.com. *The Simpsons Game,* ea.com. *TimeShift,* sierra.com. *The Witcher,* atari.com. *World in Conflict,* sierra.com.

MANTRACK

Pages 47–52: *Altec Lansing,* alteclansing .com. *Bowers & Wilkins,* bowers-wilkins.com. *Canali,* www.canali.it. *Couloir Restaurant and Bar,* jacksonhole.com. *Ermenegildo Zegna Couture,* zegna.com. *Fratelli Rossetti,* rossetti.it. *Gillette Fusion Chrome Collection,* theartof shaving.com. *Harman/Kardon,* harmankardon .com. *Hotel Terra,* hotelterrajacksonhole.com. *Karim Rashid,* karimrashidshop.com. *Montecristo,* at fine tobacconists nationwide. *Porsche,* porsche.com. *Valentino,* valentino.com.

PLAYBOY'S HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

Pages 110–115: *Ardbeg,* www.ardbeg.com. *ASUS,* asus.com. *Bobby Jones clubs,* golfspast.com. *Captain America helmet,* ironhorsehelmets .com. *Cyclos,* cyclos direct.com. *Darrel Ralph,* darrelralph.com. *Electra,* electrabike.com. *Ferragamo,* ferragamo .com. *Jack Black,* getjack black.com. *Jerico,* jericocues .net. *Line,* lineskis.com. *Lotus,* lotuscars.com. *Maker's Mark,* makersmarkgiftshop.com. *Nokia,* nokiausa.com. *Orvis,* orvis.com. *Paul Smith,* 646-613-3060. *Philips Norelco,* philips.com. *Pioneer,* pioneer electronics.com. *Playboy's Ultimate Football Weekend,* 212-261-4988. *Pleo,* ugobe .com. *Rawlings,* rawlings .com. *Sennheiser,* sennheiser usa.com. *Steinway & Sons,* steinwaylyngdorf.com. *Tecnica,* tecnicausa.com.

A NIGHT AT THE BOX

Pages 132–137: *Borrelli,* borrelliboutiques .com. *Bottega Veneta,* bottegaveneta.com. *Canali,* www.canali.it. *Charles Tyrwhitt,* ctshirts.com. *DSquared,* available at Scoop in New York. *John Lobb,* 212-888-9797. *Luigi Bianchi Mantova,* available at Berlins in Charleston, South Carolina. *Pantherella,* britishapparel.com. *Robert Talbott,* roberttalbott.com. *Salvatore Ferragamo,* 800-628-8916. *Seaward & Stearn of London,* 800-451-3985. *Sonia Spencer,* available at Fred Segal in Los Angeles. *Valentino,* available at Valentino boutiques. *Versace,* available at Versace boutiques worldwide.

POTPOURRI

Pages 208–209: *Eric Herrmann,* eric herrmannstudios.com. *Iomega,* iomega.com. *Martell,* at fine liquor stores. *McQueen's Machines: The Cars and Bikes of a Hollywood Icon,* available in bookstores. *My Mini Golf,* unicahome.com. *Sky Challenger PicoZ Battle Pack,* firebox.com. *Timex,* timex.com. *weaKnees,* weaknees.com. *Wine stoppers,* sterlingplace.com.

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Kim Kardashian

(continued from page 156)

suitors—pop star Nick Lachey, NFL superstar Reggie Bush and music producer Damon Thomas, to whom she was married from 2000 to 2004—it was Kim's liaison with singer Ray J that drew the most attention. A sex tape they made together that shows the couple frolicking on the beach and so much more found its way onto the Internet. Kim, who has repeatedly denied any involvement in releasing the tape, waged a legal battle to stop its distribution and settled with Vivid Entertainment last spring for a sum rumored to be in the millions. Not that that ended the drama.

"People now perceive me in a certain way, which is frustrating," she says, clipping her glossy dark brown hair into a neat pile on her head. "They assume I'm slutty. They don't understand that he was my boyfriend of three years. We were very much in love. But now, because of the tape, if I'm dating someone, he automatically assumes I'm going to sleep with him and do all that on the first night."

Men have been making assumptions about Kim for a long time. "I started developing young, when I was 10 or 11," she says. "Everybody used to make fun of me, and as I got older, I'd get all this attention. I used to say my prayers before bed and pray I would stop developing. I hated my breasts and always tried to hide them." It wasn't until years later that she learned to appreciate what she insists are all-natural curves. "I always laugh when it says on the Internet that I have fake boobs or butt implants or injected lips, because it's so not true. I've never had plastic surgery."

Kim sneaks a peak at her new Rolex and mentions she has a busy night ahead. Soon enough, she'll be crisscrossing velvet lines at Mr. Chow, the Viper Room, Les Deux or any number of her favorite Hollywood hangouts, with her trademark Diet Coke in hand (she doesn't smoke, drink or do drugs, she says). This being a random weeknight, Kim's not planning anything too out-there, certainly nothing like the nights she and Paris spent in Ibiza, Spain recently. "We stayed at Jade Jagger's house up in the hills," Kim recalls. "Dinner was at midnight, and the clubs opened at three. We'd close them down at seven, rest an hour, then dance again until noon. After that we'd sleep on the beach until it was time to do it all over again."

It may sound glamorous, but it's also all Kim has ever known. "Having grown up like this, I find the lifestyle completely normal," she says. "Tonight we'll go out and maybe it will be me and my sisters at one table, the Olsen twins at another, and Paris and Nicky at another. But the truth is, it's just girls having some small talk, just having fun. I honestly don't understand the fuss. But hey, as long as it's here, I can't knock it."

PHOENIX

(continued from page 117)

job performance or because hearing it makes you sick?

PHOENIX: The thing we should be discussing in the news, what the media should be going after in a heartless way, isn't the family of somebody who has passed away but instead—oh, I don't know—how about a president who's lying? That's not to say my brother's life didn't have value, but it certainly did not deserve to be covered more than world politics and other important issues, particularly when death happens every day to millions of people all over the world and we don't seem to give a fuck about that.

Q6

PLAYBOY: Did dealing with your brother's death make you ponder things like, say, life after death?

PHOENIX: Fuck no. There's just nothing. We're gone. If I do have a soul, I don't think it's interpreting life, feelings or experience. My brain is what's making sense of experience and feelings for me. So when that fucker's cut off, how can I possibly understand or feel anything?

Q7

PLAYBOY: Did you have a near-death experience when you flipped your car on a canyon road in Los Angeles in January 2006?

PHOENIX: It was pretty intense. Bad traffic around three o'clock in the afternoon, all the cars were pretty much parked, and my brakes just fucking went. It was like when you walk off a step, expecting the next step to be there, and it's not. I put on the brake, and it took me a second to go, Wait, this movement usually makes the world all around me stop. But I pumped and just fucking nothing. The horror that went through my mind was seeing this woman in her car stopped in front of me and my thinking, I don't want to hurt anybody. So to avoid the cars, I turned right into the fucking mountain. Once I hit the mountain and flipped, it was a blast: All the air bags went off, and I was enjoying this great rush because everything was fine. It was as if time stopped and nothing happened.

Q8

PLAYBOY: You've also dealt with substance-abuse issues. In 2005, a few months after completing *Walk the Line,* you checked yourself into a rehab facility to deal with alcohol problems.

PHOENIX: Paragraph two, page 148, of the actors' manual reads, "If you want to get nominated for an Oscar, go into rehab." I felt like I needed the nomination, and when rehab didn't seem to be working I decided to flip the car and say my brakes went out. It must have worked. [*laughs*] No, I just thought I was going to play Ping-Pong and cards and drink lemonade in a really nice place for a while. Then they told me I was going to have to say my name, and shit. I was like, "I don't quite think this is what I'm supposed to do." But really, I'm completely fine.

Q9

PLAYBOY: Have you always kept to a strict no-meat, no-dairy diet? Do some people think you're not much fun to be around?

PHOENIX: I don't try to impose my views on anyone else, and I can simply say I feel it's right for me. Of course, I've had slips. When I was about 12 I stayed with a friend in San Diego. They got pizza, and I was like, "I'm having some motherfucking pizza." I ate two slices and vomited for two days. I'm strange in that I crave salad and vegetables. I've never really had a sweet tooth, and I don't particularly like foods that are too rich. I'm a parent's dream.

Q10

PLAYBOY: Did having an older sibling in show business prepare you at all?

PHOENIX: I had no perception of Hollywood, and my brother, who definitely was famous, didn't carry himself as such. We didn't live in Los Angeles, and there wasn't any Hollywood feeling around us. Growing up, *Siddhartha* was lying around for us to read, not *Entertainment Weekly.*

Q11

PLAYBOY: Your character in the 1999 Nicolas Cage movie *8MM* sold porn. Are you into erotic movies?

PHOENIX: Porn is fantastic—not fantastic; it just is what it is. It's been around forever, so great, fine, have a blast, but I think my imagination is far better. For some time, though, I was hoping to do porn versions of movies I've been in. That could have been good, like *Glad He Ate Her* for *Gladiator. 8MM* you might want to remake as *8 Inches.* I have a friend who can rattle off porn titles for every movie I've been in. It's fucking genius.

Q12

PLAYBOY: One of your current movies, *We Own the Night,* has you playing a coke-snorting 1980s-era hotshot manager of a club owned by the Russian mob. You and Eva Mendes share a pretty strong sex scene.

PHOENIX: She was so game. I'd never seen such hunger in somebody's eyes—just taking in every single thing, wanting to experience, explore and play. That was so exciting because it stimulates your hunger. The sex scene was one of the last ones we shot, but it is the first scene in the movie. It was important that we show my first meeting with Eva early in the movie because once my character loses her, he will never experience that passion, that love and joy in his life again.

Q13

PLAYBOY: Mendes, who said she needed vodka to quell her nervousness when filming that scene, called you "one of the greatest actors of my generation" but also said working with you was "kind of like

working with a puppy dog or a two-year-old: When you have its attention it's really cute, but otherwise...."

PHOENIX: This puppy dog didn't realize he was a puppy dog or a two-year-old. He thought he was a 31-year-old actor trying to make a movie. Had I known I was supposed to be a puppy dog, I would have been much more cute and more consistently attentive. My apologies, Eva, but I had a few other scenes that you weren't in. This puppy dog had a lot of work to do.

Q14

PLAYBOY: Was the press right in speculating that you and she were romantically involved?

PHOENIX: They had us dating before I even met her. That was fucking hilarious. We went out the first night to get some food, and there were photographers everywhere. I'm going, Who is this fucking chick? because I swear to God, I don't know who anyone is unless I've already worked with them. Feeling like you're being scrutinized is bad when you're working. It got to a point where we couldn't even hang out, because it became a thing. I'm always amazed at the gossip that is literally created out of nothing.

Q15

PLAYBOY: Many guys would consider Mendes an ideal woman. What's your ideal?

PHOENIX: Slightly overweight, boring, no humor, supreme intelligence and extremely small breasts. No, I don't have a particular type. Unpretentiousness, sweetness and simplicity are all I look for. I live a really boring life. I'm much more clichéd, pathetic and pretentious than you would probably give me credit for. I don't want to do much of anything when I'm not working. It's important that any woman I know shouldn't need to be stimulated outside the house, because I can't provide that.

Q16

PLAYBOY: When you date someone new, do you consider yourself at a disadvantage because she can check out your movies and Google you?

PHOENIX: I'm sure that's happened, but all I can do is make sure I never do that to somebody. I cannot guarantee that people in one building don't have telescopes watching celebrities in another, but the only thing that will make me feel okay is knowing I'm not going to get a telescope and watch anybody. Recently a friend said, "I want to introduce you to a friend, a girl. She's really nice. Just look her up. Her name is——" I'll meet her when I meet her. I'm certainly not going to look her up on the Internet.

Q17

PLAYBOY: *Reservation Road*, another of your new films, is about parents dealing with the death of a child. Does grim subject matter like that do a number on you?

PHOENIX: It was obviously difficult material, but ironically, I had a good time. I loved working with Terry George, the writer and director—I did *Hotel Rwanda* with him—because he said that, unlike America, "the rest of the world assumes they're going to lose kids. They assume somebody's going to bomb them. It's just a part of life." America lives in a shell. So when 9/11 happened, for a lot of the world it was like, "Motherfuckers, we've had this shit going on for a long time." It was interesting for someone with George's perspective to get involved in this movie, because the danger was that it could simply have been a weep fest.

Q18

PLAYBOY: Speaking of weeping, did Casey Affleck really videotape your crying while you were getting tattooed?

PHOENIX: I completely forgot he videotaped it. Yeah, I was a bitch getting tattooed. I have no problems with not being manly. I'm content to cry while having a tattoo placed on the inner part of my arm, which is apparently one of the most sensitive places you can get it done. Casey and I were in Italy and wanted matching circle tattoos meaning literally "nothing." We were making fun of people who get tattoo symbols on their arms and when you ask, "What is that symbol?" they're like, "It means 'wisdom' in Gaelic," and you're like, "Oh, blow me." Wow, I wonder where that video is.

Q19

PLAYBOY: Have you watched *Gladiator* lately? Your performance as the paranoid young heir to the throne holds up well.

PHOENIX: I've seen only the first half. When my character came into the movie, I left. It's impossible for me to watch that movie—or any of my movies—in the same way anyone who wasn't directly connected to making it would. I'll only remember trying to do a scene—what I got and what I didn't. So I'm never going to be swept away. When it works, the whole fun of a movie is that you stop thinking and get completely lost in its world. It's a bad idea for actors to grow accustomed to seeing themselves on camera, because inevitably you start doing things and become too self-conscious. The only way to prevent it is by not being aware of yourself in that way or at least trying not to be.

Q20

PLAYBOY: Has anyone ever tried to convince you that if you hobnobbed and socialized more in Hollywood, you might be an even bigger name?

PHOENIX: As I recall, Michelangelo was not particularly social. I don't think John Lennon was particularly social either. The whole point of being creative is that you're off on your own, doing it. As soon as you start hobnobbing, I think you're going to forget about trying to fucking touch the sun.

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MADLY (continued from page 154)

When she looks at the camera in that scene, I feel closer to her than I've ever felt to anyone in a film.

Jagger and Belushi or find James Taylor jamming. I sat there at the bar with my fat heart going pitty-pat. In came Lauren, splendid in cowboy boots, Levi's, an open white satin blouse, a tweed coat and uncapped teeth. I'm normally voluble, but I recall stuttering a bit. We had a drink and talked about Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and Faulkner for an hour, and then she left.

That was that for another half dozen years until in New York City a magazine was giving a party at '21' for George Plimpton and me, who were columnists for it. I recall that no one recognized me when I entered, because I was wearing a camel-hair coat and a three-piece suit. Lauren had been an old friend of George Plimpton's ever since *Paper Lion,* and when she arrived we talked about my cooking dinner at her place, but nothing came of it. I excel at naps, pouring drinks, lighting my cigarettes, writing too many novels and some say cooking.

The last I heard of Lauren was at the Tosca Cafe, a bar I like in San Francisco. The owner, Jeannette Etheredge, is an old friend of Lauren's and said there had been a severe motorcycle accident and Lauren was badly injured. I sent along my sympathies and in my melancholy I wondered why people ride around on these skinless rockets, but then I also question the efficacy of internal combustion, photography, movies, mirrors. Our affections are up for grabs in our nontraditional society, but then this isn't new. A couple of years ago I visited Dante's house in Florence and questioned again how he could spend his entire life on a work dedicated to Beatrice, an eight-year-old girl who he met when he was nine, and was never to sleep with. I can sit in my studio and look at a blank wall and see all the heroines of my novels march past, carefully ignoring their origins, mindful that James M. Cain said, "I write for the wish that comes true, for some reason a terrifying concept." It is a comfort to know that women also suffer this fantasy affliction. Nearly 50 years ago during a bridge game with another couple in our squalid married-housing apartment our friend stood up and shrieked at her diminutive husband, "You shrimp, you miserable little turd, you're nothing compared to my true love, Marlon Brando."

LA BINOCHE BY MAUREEN GIBBON

You know the scene. It's from *Damage,* when she's in bed with Jeremy Irons. He's facing her, moving into her, and her cheekbone rubs against his shoulder.

With each plunge, she rocks upward. Because she's pressed tight against his body, the skin of her cheek moves up a little too.

It's that little movement of her skin, that little bit of flesh over bone, that does it for me. It's such an unusual detail that it makes me think of the other parts of her that are moving, of the more intimate friction taking place.

And when she looks at the camera in that scene, I feel closer to her than I've ever felt to anyone in a film. I feel as if I'm the one up against her, making the skin over her cheekbone move.

Did I say she keeps her necklace on through the whole thing? A thick-linked serpentine chain that rides her collarbones. The necklace makes her nakedness seem ornate, timeless and just a bit raunchy. Wearing that necklace also makes her echo that other famous French nude, Manet's *Olympia,* who wears a black ribbon choker.

Okay, so maybe the necklace does it for me too.

I do know that after I saw that movie, I went out and bought some gold beads that I could keep on in bed—me and probably hundreds of other women. I wanted to be like her, I wanted to be with her, I wanted to be her.

But my crush on La Binoche, as the French press calls her, started years before. It began back when we were both in our 20s, when she climbed and straddled Daniel Day-Lewis in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being.* She played an innocent in that movie, her want as plain as her schoolgirl underwear. It was almost hard to watch how much she revealed, how vulnerable she made herself. She was so real she made little piggy grunts when she came with Day-Lewis. And what about the scene where she and Lena Olin take photos of each other? She is shy at first, and then she isn't. She gets greedy, excited. And so did I.

She might have been a raw Czech girl in that movie, but by the time she made *Blue,* in 1993, she was a Parisian woman in a black miniskirt, black tights, black heels. Even in portraying grief and confusion, she commands—and men obey.

(Which leads me to why I don't care for *Chocolat.* What was director Lasse Hallström thinking when he made Johnny Depp the seducer in that movie? If she had been the aggressor, ordering rover Johnny to strip, the way she did with her lover in *Blue,* it might have added some salt to that sweet confection.)

Here's why I crave her:

Because she's smart and shows her thoughts on the screen. No one can think or feel the way she does on camera.

Because she has that pelt of dark hair that you know smells of her. Sometimes it's boyish and almost badly cut, and sometimes it's long with severe bangs. It's as expressive as she is. Once I saw a photo of her as a blonde, and it alarmed me. Not that I have anything against blondes, but with the exception of Deneuve I want my French actresses to be dark-haired. I just do. Or maybe I just want *her* to be dark-haired. I don't care about the rest.

Because. Of. That. Mole. It's just beneath her jaw, on the left side of her very white neck, beneath her very dark hair. I bet it makes directors change angles of scenes so it can somehow be featured. It's an imperfection. It's kissable. What can I say? It drives me to distraction.

I think that's what Daniel Auteuil's character feels when he played her husband in *The Widow of Saint-Pierre.* High-necked dresses and bonnet strings hide the beauty mark for most of the movie, but you know it's there even when a costume or camera angle won't allow you to see it. In the one bedroom scene in the movie, Auteuil touches her eyelids and lips and cites them as reasons for his strength. He also kisses her neck, right about where that tiny jewel lies. *And this,* he says. He means the captivating, bewitching little mole—or at least that's what I like to think.

While Auteuil's character may publicly be Monsieur Le Capitaine, a French officer, because of her, his primary role in life is lover. He is an admirer of beauty marks, a sniffer of lace underthings, a devotee of her.

I understand fully.

If you do any amount of Googling and surfing, you'll find plenty of comments about her, like "Her face tells a story," "Radiant" and "Most beautiful actress of our time." But I also found the statement "I'd crawl over broken glass for Juliette."

Moi aussi, buddy. Me too.

SAVE ME BY SHERMAN ALEXIE

I fall in love with lesbians. Not porn lesbians. Everyday lesbians. The ones who don't want men to fall in love with them. Oh, they don't mind the attention, even the flirtation, but the physical boundaries are firmly in place. But wait, I fall for the other kind, too. The lesbians who want men to fall in love with them so they can ground and pound the vain masculine heart. And I once fell in love with a shy and tentative one.

I lost my virginity to a lesbian. Didn't know she was one until she started weeping in the back of my car. My mother's car. A mini station wagon. A high school love machine.

Anyway, she wept.

If I'd been a prodigal film buff, I might

have thought of Roger Vadim's infamous quote that he finds nothing sexier than a naked woman weeping.

But I was just an arrogant and self-impressed postcoital boy (I figure Vadim never stopped being an arrogant and self-impressed postcoital boy).

I thought maybe I'd hurt my first lover with my enormous penis. I thought maybe I'd opened up physical, emotional and spiritual parts of her that she never knew existed. I thought I'd been so good that I'd created a new School of Art.

"Why are you crying?" I asked.

"Because I'm a lesbian," she said.

Holy, holy, holy.

Damaged soldiers duck when cars backfire; I duck whenever I see a woman who looks exactly like James Dean.

Cut to summer 1994, Seattle, summer concerts on the pier.

Emily Saliers and Amy Ray, the Indigo Girls, are starring in a revival of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's secular craptacular, *Jesus Christ Superstar.*

My wife and I go because we love the Indigo Girls (and frankly, because we also love Andrew Lloyd Webber's craptaculars). I can sing along to 50 or 60 of the Indigo Girls' songs (and here, I feel insecure enough to tell you that I can also sing along to 200 AC/DC, Metallica and Black Sabbath songs and have a nice spin move on the basketball court). So anyway, my wife and I arrive on the pier, sit in row 30 or 40, near the aisle, and, let me tell you, the lesbian weather is torrential. The crowd is maybe 90 percent female, and at least half of them are lesbians. More like two thirds of them. Maybe it's 90 percent of them. And please don't accuse me of sexuality profiling those women. They were overtly and obviously lesbians. Some of them wore T-shirts that read, YES, I AM A LESBIAN. It was a United Nations of lesbians, Baskin-Robbins of lesbians and color wheel of lesbians.

"You're in heaven, aren't you?" my wife asks.

She knows I fetish for lesbians, feet and, well, lesbian feet. My wife is straight, but I wouldn't be terribly shocked if she came roaring out of the closet one day.

"I'm not in heaven," I say. "I am living here and now on this wonderful planet called Earth."

We're late in arriving, so the show starts immediately. Music swells. The lights go down (making the orange falling sun explode its orangeness all over the dark waters of Elliot Bay. Who knew orange is the sexiest color on the planet?) and then she appears.

And by she, I mean SHE, The Lord Jesus Christ.

Dressed in a simple brown coat and pants, carpenter wear, Amy Ray comes walking from the back of the pier, singing the overture, and walks down the aisle near us.

And the crowd goes mad. Fucking crazy. Call me a sexist. Call me callow. Call me a pornographic dreamer. But I am quite sure that hundreds of women had spontaneous orgasms when Amy Ray/Jesus materialized in our presence.

Amy Ray is not a typically beautiful woman. Oh, she has great eyes and smile. She's tall and rather curvy. And she's smarter than hell and sings gorgeously and loves the *New York Times* Sunday crossword. So, in short, she would be a major league catch for any woman or man. But she's nobody's cover girl. Not really.

Of course, all of those shallow considerations vanish in the presence of the sacred.

As Amy walks down the aisle, singing, a dozen or more women touch her. They touch her hair and arms and legs. They touch her belly and back. And Amy touches them. It's quite erotic.

But then I realize it's something else, too.

These women, these lesbians, have spent their lives being excluded, ridiculed, misunderstood, stereotyped and despised, often by members of their own families, and especially by the church.

Which church? Pretty much all of them.

And now, here is the savior, the messiah, the alpha and omega, the man at the foundation of Christianity and the United States, and this man is no longer a man. Jesus is a lesbian.

And so it all felt deeply spiritual, sexual and blasphemous.

Can blasphemy be sexy? Damn right, it can be, especially when one believes that the churches, and all of their preachers and congregates, are absolutely wrong about gays.

"Jesus," my wife says as Amy parts the crowd and walks onstage. "I never knew she was so beautiful."

I want to tell my wife that I always knew, but of course, I didn't. Somebody familiar to us had become somebody exotic. The secular and sacred are blended in one person. And isn't that the hottest thing imaginable?

FRANCHOT TONE AT THE PARAMOUNT

BY PAULA FOX

Franchot Tone died in September 1968. In 1935, when I was 12, I saw the actor in the earliest version of the film *Mutiny on the Bounty.* I sat in a dark movie house, my knees pressed up against the unoccupied seat in front of me. Tone played one of the officers who mutiny against the cruel Captain Bligh (Charles Laughton), whom they put overboard into a small lifeboat and abandon to the open sea.

The crew and officers return to Tahiti. It is an exuberant story. The great ship moves through the waves, the masts

creak, the sails billow as crew members shout across the decks to one another amid ocean spray. Then they are in Tahiti, and Franchot Tone, wearing a sarong, a wreath of large white-petaled blossoms hanging from his neck, stands close to a beautiful young Tahitian woman. Another fleshy fellow in the cast is the star of the movie, Clark Gable, a large man whose acting I found severely limited. I paid him no attention.

My knees slipped down from the seatback to the floor. I leaned forward, enraptured by Tone, his delicate features, his narrow-lipped mouth, the irony I thought implicit in his remote smile that assured me, "I'm superior to all this playacting...," and above all by what I perceived as his nature, quixotic and spiritual.

I had been struck a great blow by the force of movie love. Later, in 1939, on spring vacation from a Montreal boarding school, I saw Tone in a Group Theatre production of *The Gentle People*.

My father, a screenwriter at the time, knew the business manager of the Group, Walter Fried, whom he called Cousin Wally. Fried arranged for me to see the play. He smoked cigars, wore a dark fedora, and the top of his shirt was unbuttoned.

On the evening I attended the play, Cousin Wally told me through the box-office grille that he had arranged for the cast to meet for drinks in a small frowzy bar across the street from the theater. Would I like to join them there?

After the final curtain fell I walked over to the bar, uneasy yet exalted. But Tone didn't turn up, although the rest of the cast was there. I felt a bleak relief at his absence, at the same time disappointment without end.

I had bought a dress for the occasion. *Bought* is hardly the right word. In those days you could return clothes to stores the next day with an excuse that the dress was too tight, too loose, too anything at all. *Borrow* would be more apt.

Before Act One, I walked down the aisle to my free seat, aware of how people were staring at me. Later, in the ladies' room, I saw in a mirror that I had forgotten to remove the price tag hanging from the back of the dress. People must have noticed the large white cardboard rectangle, size and price printed on it in big black letters. I was unembarrassed by my emotions that evening; they were all-consuming, and I was barely aware of them. But the tag shamed me. I returned the dress the next morning.

A few days later I bought a book, *Trivia*, by an Anglophile writer, Logan Pearsall Smith, and along with a letter, sent it via Cousin Wally to Tone. As I think back now, it seems to me that Fried was highly amused by the entire incident.

I hardly recall my letter. It was probably an effort to differentiate myself from his other admirers and to praise the book for qualities that would attest to my own sensibilities. Cousin Wally told me later that Franchot had assembled the cast and read my letter aloud to them.

Yet he answered it. Joy leapt up in me when I saw the envelope. His reply was cordial, intimate, I judged. But I was faintly distressed by what I sensed was a distancing sardonic note. But what did I expect? Everything, I suppose.

I kept his reply in a file cabinet in the cellar of the brownstone where I now live, until a decade ago. One morning a local water main burst. A flood resulted, and it took many hours for firemen to pump out the six feet of water. Tone's letter was ruined, along with other correspondence and some book contracts.

When I was 16 I lived with an elderly alcoholic woman, a friend of my stepmother's, who had sent me to California with her. One rainy afternoon in Hollywood, where we lived, I drove to a local drugstore to get a prescription for her. As I hastened back to where I had parked, on tiptoe to avoid the deeper puddles of water, a voice from a parked car inquired, "Where are your ballet slippers?"

It was Franchot Tone. My heart raced as I smiled in his direction, but I hurried to my car through the rain, which had gotten suddenly heavier.

A few years later, back in New York City, I went to see a movie of his, *Five Graves to Cairo*, I think it was titled, at the Paramount Theatre in the Broadway district. The sidewalk was crawling with adolescent girls, agitated, some crying, others laughing as they left their places in the line to dance a few steps on the street. In that era there were stage shows in some movie houses. The girls had all come to see and hear Frank Sinatra, a singer. The name meant nothing to me.

I found a balcony seat near three sailors who laughed raucously as they jeered at the teenagers below us in the audience, who were keening and shrieking.

A skinny young man entered the stage as a curtain was parting to reveal the orchestra behind him. He sang, holding on to the microphone, desperately, I thought, as though it would save him from drowning among his worshippers. What was it that drove them crazy? Franchot Tone was, after all, a serious actor....

The last time I saw Tone was in a small shop on Lexington Avenue in Manhattan. The optician who owned it was an old friend, and I had joined him for a brown-bag lunch. We were sitting at the rear of the narrow store, eating sandwiches, when Tone, wearing a beret, opened the door and leaned in.

In that first moment of my recognition of him—though like me he had grown much older—I lost my breath. He smiled at me, and it was such a lovely smile! All his old charm for me was in it. He asked Lou, my friend, when his eyeglasses would be ready. The optician replied, but I couldn't hear language. What I felt at that moment was beyond words. My hearing returned in time to hear Tone's thanks and good-bye to Lou.

Upon first seeing him years earlier, I had been astonished by the emotions his screen presence had brought to life in me. I had loved him in a make-believe way—the way most emotion begins—for years.

That intensity of feeling prepared me, in some fashion, for love itself, its contrarieties, its defeats, its beauty.

"PETA made me get rid of the reindeer."

MUTE

(continued from page 88)

"Fifty-four, Barbara's fifty-four. We've been married twenty-six years. One kid. A daughter. A lovely daughter. Kelsie Ann. She goes to school in Cleveland, and I don't know how I'm going to keep her there, because two weeks ago, with no warning, my wife turned into Mount St. Helens. Turns out she's got a boyfriend. Has had a boyfriend for almost two years. He's a teacher—well, of course he is, what else would he be?—but she calls him Cowboy Bob. Turns out a lot of those nights I thought she was at Cooperative Extension or Book Circle, she was drinking tequila shooters and line dancing with Cowboy Fucking Bob."

It was funny. Anyone could see that. It was sitcom shit if there had ever been sitcom shit. But his eyes—although tearless—were stinging as if they were full of poison ivy. He glanced to his right, but the hitchhiker was still mostly turned away, and now his forehead was leaning against the glass of the passenger window. Sleeping for sure.

Almost for sure.

Monette hadn't spoken of her betrayal aloud. Kelsie still didn't know, although the bubble of her ignorance would pop soon. The straws were flying in the wind—he'd hung up on three different reporters before leaving on this trip—but there was nothing they could print or broadcast yet. That would change soon, but Monette would go on getting by with *No comment* for as long as possible, mostly to spare himself embarrassment. In the meantime, though, he was commenting plenty, and doing so brought a great, angry relief. In a way it was like singing in the shower. Or vomiting there.

"She's fifty-four," he said. "That's what I can't get over. It means she started up with this guy, whose real name is Robert Yandowsky—how's that for a cowboy name—when she was fifty-two. Fifty-*two*! Would you say that's old enough to know better, my friend? Old enough to have sowed your wild oats, then ripped them up again and planted a more useful crop? My God, she wears *bifocals*! She's had her gallbladder out! And she's boffing this guy! In the Grove Motel, where the two of them have set up housekeeping! I gave her a nice house in Buxton, a two-car garage, she's got an Audi on long lease, and she threw it all away to get drunk on Thursday nights in Range Riders, then shag this guy until the dawn's early light—or however long they can manage—and she's fifty-four! Not to mention Cowboy Bob, *who is fucking sixty*!"

He heard himself ranting, told himself to stop, saw the hitchhiker hadn't moved (unless he'd sunk a little deeper into the collar of his duffle coat—that might have happened), and realized he didn't *have* to stop. He was in a car. He was on I-95, somewhere east of the sun and west of Augusta. His passenger was a deaf-mute. He could rant if he wanted to rant.

He ranted.

"Barb spilled everything. She wasn't defiant about it, and she wasn't ashamed. She seemed...serene. Shell-shocked, maybe. Or still living in a fantasy world."

And she'd said it was partly his fault.

"I'm on the road a lot, that much is true. Over three hundred days last year. She was on her own—we only had the one chick, you know, and that one finished with high school and flown the coop. So it was my fault. Cowboy Bob and all the rest of it."

His temples were throbbing, and his nose was almost shut. He sniffed back hard enough to make black dots fly before his eyes and got no relief. Not in his nose, anyway. In his head he finally felt better. He was very glad he'd picked the hitchhiker up. He could have spoken these things aloud in the empty car, but——

— 5 —

"But it wouldn't have been the same," he told the shape on the other side of the confessional wall. He looked straight ahead as he said it, right at FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALLEN SHORT OF GOD'S GLORY. "Do you understand that, Father?"

"Of course I do," the priest replied—and rather cheerfully. "Even though you've clearly fallen away from Mother Church—except for a few superstitious remnants like your St. Christopher's medal—you shouldn't even have to ask. Confession is good for the soul. We've known that for two thousand years."

Monette had taken to wearing the St. Christopher's medal that had once upon a time swung from his rearview mirror. Perhaps it was just superstition, but he had driven millions of miles in all kinds of shit weather with that medal for company and had never so much as dented a fender.

"Son, what else did she do, your wife? Besides sinning with Cowboy Bob?"

Monette surprised himself by laughing. And on the other side of the screen, the priest laughed too. The difference was the quality of the laughter. The priest saw the funny side. Monette supposed he was still trying to ward off insanity.

"Well, there was the underwear," he said.

— 6 —

"She bought underwear," he told the hitchhiker, who still sat slumped and mostly turned away, with his forehead against the window and his breath fogging the glass. Pack between his feet, sign resting on top with the side reading I AM MUTE! facing up. "She showed me. It was in the guest room closet. It damn near *filled* the guest room closet. Bustiers and camisoles and bras and silk stockings still in their packages, dozens of pairs. What looked like about a thousand garter belts. But mostly there were panties, panties, panties. She said Cowboy Bob was 'a real panty man.' I think she would have gone on, told me just how that worked, but I got the picture. I got it a lot better than I wanted to. I said, 'Of course he's a panty man, he grew up jerking off to PLAYBOY, he's fucking *sixty*.'"

They were passing the Fairfield sign now. Green and smeary through the windshield, with a wet crow hunched on top.

"It was the good stuff, too," Monette said. "A lot was Victoria's Secret from the mall, but there was also stuff from a high-priced underwear boutique called Sweets. In Boston. I didn't even know there *were* underwear boutiques, but I have since been educated. Had to've been thousands of dollars' worth piled up in that closet. Also shoes. High heels, for the most part. You know, stilettos. She had that hot-babe thing down pat. Although I imagine she took off her bifocals when she put on her latest Wonderbra and tap pants. But——"

A semi droned by. Monette had his headlights on and automatically flicked his high beams for a moment when the rig was past. The driver flicked a thank-you with his taillights. Sign language of the road.

"But a lot of it hadn't even been *worn*. That was the thing. It was just...just pack-ratted away. I asked her why she'd bought so goddamn much, and she either didn't know or couldn't explain. 'We just got into the habit,' she said. 'It was like foreplay, I guess.' Not ashamed. Not defiant. Like she was thinking, *This is all a dream I'll wake up from soon*. The two of us standing there are looking at that rummage sale of slips and skivvies and shoes and God knows what else piled in the back. Then I asked her where she got the money—I mean, I see the credit-card slips at the end of each month, and there weren't any from Sweets of Boston—and we got to the real problem. Which was embezzlement."

— 7 —

"Embezzlement," the priest said. Monette wondered if the word had ever been spoken in this confessional before and decided it probably had been. *Theft* for sure.

"She worked for MSAD 19," Monette said. "MSAD stands for Maine School Administrative District. It's one of the big ones, just south of Portland. Based in Dowrie, as a matter of fact, home of both Range Riders—the line-dancing joint—and the historic Grove Motel, just down the road from there. Convenient. Get your dancing and your fuh...your lovemaking all in the same area. Why, you wouldn't even have to drive your car if you happened to have a snootful. Which on most evenings they did have. Tequila shooters for her, whiskey for him. Jack, naturally. She told me. She told me everything."

"Was she a teacher?"

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Playboy, date of production: October 2007. Custodian of Records is Ben Taylor. All records required by law to be maintained by publisher are located at 680 North Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, Illinois 60611.
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"Oh no—teachers don't have access to that kind of money; she never could have embezzled over a hundred and twenty thousand dollars if she'd been a teacher. We've had the district superintendent and his wife over to the house for dinner, and of course I saw him at all the end-of-school-year picnics, usually at the Dowrie Country Club. Victor McCrea. University of Maine graduate. Played football. Majored in phys ed. Crew cut. Probably floated through on gift Cs, but a nice man, the kind who knows fifty different guy-walks-into-a-bar jokes. In charge of a dozen schools, from the five elementaries to Muskie High. Very large annual budget, might be able to add four and four on his own in a pinch. Barb was his executive secretary for twelve years."

Monette paused.

"Barb had the checkbook."

— 8 —

The rain was getting heavier. Now it was just short of a downpour. Monette slowed to fifty without even thinking about it, while other cars buzzed blithely past him in the left lane, each dragging up its own cloud of water. Let them buzz. He himself had had a long and accident-free career selling the best fall list ever (not to mention the best spring list ever and a few Summer Surprise lists, which mostly consisted of cookbooks, diet books and *Harry Potter* knockoffs), and he wanted to keep it that way.

On his right, the hitchhiker stirred a little.

"You awake, buddy?" Monette asked. A useless question, but natural.

The hitchhiker uttered a comment from the end of him that apparently wasn't mute: *Phweeet*. Small, polite and—best of all—odorless.

"I take that as a yes," Monette said, returning his attention to his driving. "Where was I?"

The underwear, that's where he was. He could still see it. Piled up in the closet like a teenager's wet dream. Then the confession of the embezzlement: that staggering figure. After he'd taken time to consider the possibility that she might be lying for some crazy reason (but of course it was *all* crazy), he had asked her how much was left, and she said—in that same calm and dazed manner—that there was nothing left, really, although she supposed she could get more. For a while, at least.

" 'But they're going to find out soon now,' she said. 'If it was just poor old clueless Vic, I suppose I could go on forever, but the state auditors were in last week. They asked too many questions, and they took copies of the records. It won't be long now.'

"So I asked her how she could spend well over a hundred thousand dollars on knickers and garter belts," Monette told his silent companion. "I didn't feel angry—at least not then, I guess I was too shocked—but I was honestly curious. And she said—in that same way, not ashamed, not defiant, like she was sleepwalking: 'Well, we got interested in the lottery. I suppose we thought we could make it back that way.' "

Monette paused. He watched the windshield wipers go back and forth. He briefly considered the idea of twisting the wheel to the right and sending the car into one of the concrete overpass supports just ahead. He rejected the idea. He would later tell the priest part of the reason was that ancient childhood prohibition against suicide, but mostly he was thinking he'd like to hear the Josh Ritter album at least one more time before he died.

Plus, he was no longer alone.

Instead of committing suicide (and taking his passenger with him), he drove beneath the overpass at that steady, moderate fifty (for maybe two seconds the windshield was clear, then the wipers once more found work to do) and resumed his story.

"They must have bought more lottery tickets than anyone in history." He thought it over, then shook his head. "Well...probably not. But they bought ten thousand for sure. She said that last November—I was in New Hampshire and Massachusetts almost that whole month, plus the sales conference in Delaware—they bought over two thousand. Powerball, Megabucks, Paycheck, Pick 3, Pick 4, Triple Play, they hit them all. At first they chose the numbers, but Barb said after a while that took too long and they went to the EZ Pick option."

Monette pointed to the white plastic box glued to his windshield, just below the stem of the rearview mirror.

"All these gadgets speed up the world. Maybe that's a good thing, but I sort of doubt it. She said, 'We went the EZ Pick route because the people standing in line behind you get impatient if you take too long to pick your own numbers, especially when the jackpot's over a hundred million.' She said sometimes she and Yandowsky split up and hit different stores, as many as two dozen in an evening. And of course they sold them right there at the place where they went to line dance.

"She said, 'The first time Bob played, we won five hundred dollars on a Pick 3. It was so romantic.' " Monette shook his head. "After that, the romance stayed, but the winning pretty much stopped. That was what she said. She said once they won a thousand, but by then they were already thirty thousand in the bucket. *In the bucket* is what she called it.

"One time—this was in January, while I was out on the road trying to earn back the price of the cashmere coat I got her for Christmas—she said they went up to Derry and spent a couple of days. I don't know if they've got line dancing up there or not, I never checked, but they've got a

place called Hollywood Slots. They stayed in a suite, ate high off the hog—she said *high off the hog*—and dropped seventy-five hundred playing video poker. But, she said, they didn't like that so much. Mostly they just stuck to the lottery, plugging in more and more of the SAD's dough, trying to get even before the state auditors came and the roof fell in. And every now and then, of course, she'd buy some new underwear. A girl wants to be fresh when she's buying Powerball tix at the local 7-Eleven.

"You all right, buddy?"

There was no response from his passenger—of course not—so Monette reached out and shook the man's shoulder. The hitcher lifted his head from the window (his forehead had left a greasy mark on the glass) and looked around, blinking his red-rimmed eyes as if he had been asleep. Monette didn't think he'd been asleep. No reason why, just a feeling.

He made a thumb-and-forefinger circle at the hitchhiker, then raised his eyebrows.

For a moment the hitcher only looked blank, giving Monette time to think the guy was bull-stupid as well as deaf-mute. Then he smiled and nodded and returned the circle.

"Okay," Monette said. "Just checking."

The man leaned his head back against the window again. In the meantime, the guy's presumed destination, Waterville, had slid behind them and into the rain. Monette didn't notice. He was still living in the past.

"If it had been just lingerie and the kind of lottery games where you pick a bunch of numbers, the damage might have been limited," he said. "Because playing the lottery that way takes time. It gives you a chance to come to your senses, always presuming you have any to come to. You have to stand in line and collect the slips and save them in your wallet. Then you have to watch TV or check the paper for the results. It might still have been okay. If, that is, you can call anything okay about your wife catting around with a stoneboat-dumb history teacher and flushing thirty or forty thousand dollars' worth of the school district's money down the shitter. But thirty grand I might have been able to cover. I could have taken out a second mortgage on the house. Not for Barb, no way, but for Kelsie Ann. A kid just starting out in life doesn't need a stinking fish like that around her neck. Restitution is what they call it. I would have made restitution even if it meant living in a two-bedroom apartment. You know?"

The hitchhiker obviously *didn't* know—not about beautiful young daughters just starting out in life, or second mortgages, or restitution. He was warm and dry in his dead-silent world, and that was probably better.

Monette plowed forward nonetheless. "Thing is, there are quicker ways to chuck your money, and it's as legal as…as buying underwear."

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"They moved on to scratch tickets, didn't they?" the priest asked. "What the Lottery Commission calls instant winners."

"You speak like a man who's had a flutter himself," Monette said.

"From time to time," the priest agreed, and with an admirable lack of hesitation. "I always tell myself that if I should ever get a real golden ticket, I'd put all the money into the church. But I never risk more than five dollars a week." This time there *was* hesitation. "Sometimes ten." Another pause. "And once I bought a twenty-dollar scratch, back when they were new. But that was a momentary madness. I never did it again."

"At least not so far," Monette said.

The priest chuckled. "The words of a man who has truly had his fingers burned, son." He sighed. "I'm fascinated by your story, but I wonder if we could move it along a bit faster? My company will wait while I do the Lord's work, but not forever. And I believe we're having chicken salad, heavy on the mayo. A favorite of mine."

"There's not much more," Monette said. "If you've played, you've got the gist of it. You can buy the scratch tickets at all the same places you can buy the Powerball and Megabucks tickets, but you can also buy them at a lot of other places, including turnpike rest stops. You don't even need to do business with a clerk; you can get them from a machine. The machines are always green, the color of money. By the time Barb came clean——"

"By the time she confessed," the priest said, with what might have been a touch of actual slyness.

"Yes, by the time she *confessed*, they'd pretty much settled on the twenty-dollar scratch-offs. Barb said she never bought any when she was on her own, but when she was with Cowboy Bob, they'd buy a lot. Hoping for that big score, you know. Once she said they bought a hundred of those puppies in a single night. That's two thousand dollars' worth. They got back eighty. They each had their own little plastic ticket scratcher. They look like snow scrapers for elves and have MAINE STATE LOTTERY written on the handle. They're green, like the vending machines that sell the tickets. She showed me hers—it was under the guest room bed. You couldn't make out anything except TERY on it. Could have been MYSTERY instead of LOTTERY. The sweat from her palm had wiped out all the rest."

"Son, did you strike her? Is that why you're here?"

"No," Monette said. "I wanted to *kill* her for it—the money, not the cheating, the cheating part just seemed unreal, even with all that fuh…all that underwear right in front of my eyes. But I didn't lay

so much as a finger on her. I think it was because I was too tired. All that information had just tired me out. What I wanted to do was take a nap. A long one. Maybe a couple of days long. Is that strange?"

"No," the priest said.

"I asked her how she could do something like that to me. Did she care so little? And *she* asked——"

— 10 —

"She asked me how come I didn't know," Monette told the hitchhiker. "And before I could say anything, she answered herself, so I guess it was a whatchacallit, a rhetorical question. She said, 'You didn't know because you didn't care. You were almost always on the road, and when you weren't on the road, you *wanted* to be on the road. It's been ten years since you cared what underwear I have on—why would you, when you don't care about the woman inside it? But you care now, don't you? You do now.'

"Man, I just looked at her. I was too tired to kill her—or even slap her—but I was mad, all right. Even through the shock, I was mad. She was trying to make it my fault. You see that, don't you? Trying to lay it all off on my fucking *job*, as if I could get another one that paid even half as much. I mean, at my age what else am I qualified for? I guess I could get a job as school crossing guard—I don't have any morals busts in my past—but that would be about it."

He paused. Far down the road, still mostly hidden by a shifting camisole of rain, was a blue sign.

He considered, then said, "But even that wasn't the real point. You want to know the point? Her point? I was supposed to feel guilty for *liking* my job. For not drudging through my days until I found the right person to go *absolutely fucking bonkers* with!"

The hitcher stirred a little, probably only because they'd hit a bump (or run over some roadkill), but it made Monette realize he was shouting. And hey, the guy might not be completely deaf. Even if he was, he might feel vibrations in the bones of his face once sounds passed a certain decibel level. Who the fuck knew?

"I didn't get into it with her," Monette said in a lower voice. "I *refused* to get into it with her. I think I knew that if I did, if we really started to argue, anything might happen. I wanted to get out of there while I was still in shock...because that was protecting her, see?"

The hitchhiker said nothing, but Monette saw for both of them.

"I said, 'What happens now?' and she said, 'I suppose I'll go to jail.' And you know what? If she'd started to cry then, I might have held her. Because after twenty-six years of marriage, things like that get to be a reflex. Even when most of the feeling's gone. But she didn't cry, so I walked out. Just turned around and walked out. And when I came back, there was a note saying she'd *moved* out. That was almost two weeks ago, and I haven't seen her since. Talked to her on the phone a few times, that's all. Talked to a lawyer, too. Froze all our accounts, not that it'll do any good once the legal wheels start turning. Which will be soon. The caca is going to clog the air-cooling system, if you take my meaning. Then I suppose I'll see her again. In court. Her and Cowboy Fucking Bob."

Now he could read the blue sign: PITTSFIELD REST AREA 2 MI.

"Ah, shit!" he cried. "Waterville's fifteen miles back thataway, partner." And when the deaf-mute didn't stir (of course not), Monette realized he didn't know the guy had been going to the Ville anyway. Not for sure. In any case, it was time to get this straightened out. The rest area would do for that, but for a minute or two longer they would remain enclosed in this rolling confessional, and he felt he had one more thing to say.

"It's true that I haven't felt much for her in a very long time," he said. "Sometimes love just runs out. And it's also true that I haven't been entirely faithful—I've taken a little road comfort from time to time. But does *that* warrant *this*? Does it justify a woman blowing up a life the way a kid would blow up a rotten apple with a firecracker?"

He pulled into the rest area. There were maybe four cars in the lot, huddled up against the brown building with the vending machines in the front. To Monette the cars looked like cold children left out in the rain. He parked. The hitchhiker looked at him questioningly.

"Where are you going?" Monette asked, knowing it was hopeless.

The deaf-mute considered. He looked around and saw where they were. He looked back at Monette as if to say, *Not here.*

Monette pointed back south and raised his eyebrows. The deaf-mute shook his head, then pointed north. Opened and closed his fists, showing his fingers six times...eight...ten. Same as before, basically. But this time Monette got it. He thought life might have been simpler for this guy if someone had taught him the sideways figure-eight symbol that means *infinity.*

"You're basically just rambling, aren't you?" Monette asked.

The deaf-mute only looked at him.

"Yeah you are," Monette said. "Well, I tell you what. You listened to my story—even though you didn't know you were listening to it—and I'll get you as far as Derry." An idea struck him. "In fact, I'll drop you at the Derry Shelter. You can get a hot and a cot, at least for one night. I have to take a leak. You need to take a leak?"

The deaf-mute looked at him with patient blankness.

"A leak," Monette said. "A *piss.*" He started to point at his crotch, realized where they were and decided a road bum would think he was signing for a blow job right here beside the Hav-A-Bite machines. He pointed toward the silhouettes on the side of the building instead—black cutout man, black cutout woman. The man had his legs apart, the woman had hers together. Pretty much the story of the human race in sign language.

This his passenger got. He shook his head decisively, then made another thumb-and-forefinger circle for good measure. Which left Monette with a

"Sir! Can I help you fight off holiday depression?"

delicate problem: leave Mr. Silent Vagabond in the car while he did his business or turn him out into the rain to wait…in which case the guy would almost certainly know why he was being put out.

Only it wasn't a problem at all, he decided. There was no money in the car, and his personal luggage was locked in the trunk. There were his sample cases in the backseat, but he somehow didn't think the guy was going to steal two seventy-pound cases and go trotting down the rest area's exit ramp with them. For one thing, how would he hold up his I AM MUTE! sign?

"I'll be right back," Monette said, and when the hitchhiker only looked at him with those red-rimmed eyes, Monette pointed to himself, to the restroom icons, then back to himself. This time the hitchhiker nodded and made another thumb-and-forefinger circle.

Monette went to the toilet and pissed for what felt like twenty minutes. The relief was exquisite. He felt better than he had since Barb had dropped her bombshell. It occurred to him for the first time that he was going to get through this. And he would help Kelsie get through it. He remembered a quote from some old German (or maybe a Russian, it certainly sounded like the Russian view of life): Whatever does not kill me makes me stronger.

He went back to his car, whistling. He even gave the coin-op lottery-ticket machine a comradely slap as he went by. At first he thought maybe he couldn't see his passenger because the guy was lying down…in which case, Monette would have to shoo him upright again so he could get behind the wheel. But the hitchhiker wasn't lying down. The hitchhiker was gone. Had taken his pack and his sign and decamped.

Monette checked the backseat and saw his Wolfe & Sons cases undisturbed. Looked into the glove compartment and saw the paltry identification kept within—registration, insurance card, AAA card—was still there. All that was left of the bum was a lingering smell, not entirely unpleasant: sweat and faint pine, as if the guy had been sleeping rough.

He thought he'd see the guy at the foot of the ramp, holding up his sign and patiently switching it from side to side so that potential Good Samaritans got the complete lowdown on his defects. If so, Monette would stop and pick him up again. The job didn't feel done, somehow. Delivering the guy to the Derry Shelter—that would make the job feel done. That would close the deal, and close the book. Whatever other failings he might have, he liked to finish things.

But the guy wasn't at the foot of the ramp; the guy was completely AWOL. And it wasn't until Monette was passing a sign reading DERRY 10 MI. that he looked up at the rearview mirror and saw that his St. Christopher's medal, companion of all those millions of miles, was gone. The deaf-mute had stolen it. But not even that could break Monette's new optimism. Maybe the deaf-mute needed it more than he did. Monette hoped it would bring him good luck.

Two days later—by then he was selling the best fall list ever in Presque Isle—he got a call from the Maine State Police. His wife and Bob Yandowsky had been beaten to death in the Grove Motel. The killer had used a piece of pipe wrapped in a motel towel.

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"My…dear…*God*!" the priest breathed.

"Yes," Monette agreed, "that's pretty much what I thought."

"Your daughter…?"

"Heartbroken, of course. She's with me, at home. We'll get through this, Father. She's tougher than I thought. And of course, she doesn't know about the other. The embezzlement. With luck, she never will. There's going to be a very large insurance payment, what they call double indemnity. Given everything that went on before, I think I would be in moderate to serious trouble with the police now if I didn't have a cast-iron alibi. And if there hadn't been…developments. As it is, I've been questioned several times."

"Son, you didn't pay someone to——"

"I've been asked that, too. The answer is no. I've thrown my bank accounts open to anyone who wants a look. Every penny is accounted for, both in my half of the wedded partnership and in Barb's. She was financially very responsible. At least in the sane part of her life.

"Father, can you open up on your side? I want to show you something."

Instead of replying, the priest opened his door. Monette slipped the St. Christopher's medal from around his neck, then reached around from his side. Their fingers touched briefly as the medal and its little pile of steel chain passed from hand to hand.

There was silence for five seconds as the priest considered it. Then he said, "This was returned to you when? Was it at the motel where——"

"No," Monette said. "Not the motel. The house in Buxton. On the dresser in what used to be our bedroom. Next to our wedding picture, actually."

"Dear God," the priest said.

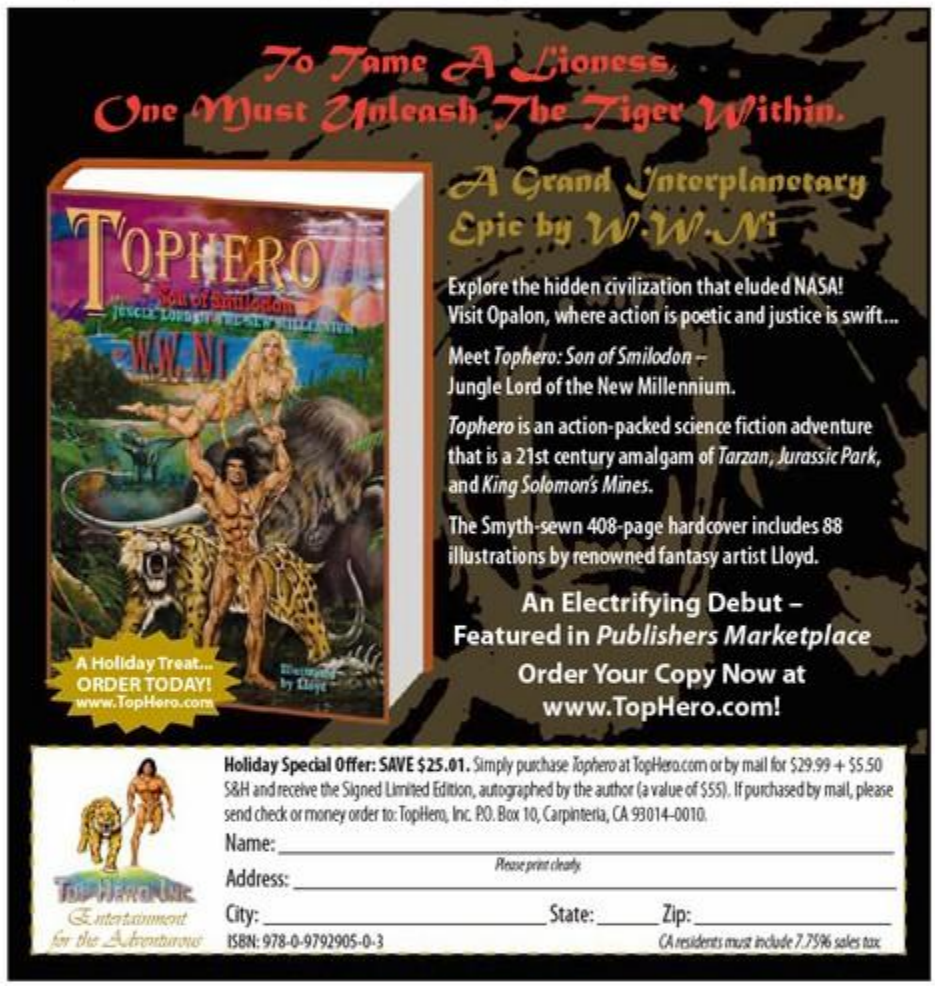
"He could have gotten the address from my car registration when I was in the john."

"And of course you mentioned the name of the motel…and the town…."

"Dowrie," Monette agreed.

For the third time the priest invoked the name of his Boss. Then he said, "The fellow wasn't deaf-mute at all, was he?"

"I'm almost positive he was mute," Monette said, "but he sure wasn't deaf.



There was a note beside the medal, on a piece of paper he tore off the phone pad. All this must have happened while my daughter and I were at the funeral home, picking out a casket. The back door was open but not jimmied. He might have been smart enough to trig the lock, but I think I just forgot and left it open when we went out."

"The note said what?"

"'Thank you for the ride,'" Monette said.

"I'll be damned." Thoughtful silence, then a soft knocking just outside the door of the confessional in which Monette sat, contemplating FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALLEN SHORT OF GOD'S GLORY. Monette took back his medal.

"Have you told the police?"

"Yes, of course, the whole story. They think they know who the guy is. They're familiar with the sign. His name is Stanley Doucette. He's spent years rambling around New England with that sign of his. Sort of like me, now that I think of it."

"Prior crimes of violence on his record?"

"A few," Monette said. "Fights, mostly. Once he beat a man pretty badly in a bar, and he's been in and out of mental institutions, including Serenity Hill, in Augusta. I don't think the police told me everything."

"Do you want to know everything?"

Monette considered, then said, "No."

"They haven't caught this fellow."

"They say it's only a matter of time. They say he's not bright. But he was bright enough to fool me."

"*Did* he fool you, son? Or did you know you were speaking to a listening ear? It seems to me that is the key question."

Monette was quiet for a long time. He didn't know if he had honestly searched his heart before, but he felt he was searching it now, and with a bright light. Not liking everything he found there but searching, yes. Not overlooking what he saw there. At least not on purpose.

"I did not," he said.

"And are you glad your wife and her lover are dead?"

In his heart, Monette instantly said *yes*. Aloud he said, "I'm relieved. I'm sorry to say that, Father, but considering the mess she made—and how it's apt to work out, with no trial and quiet restitution made out of the insurance money—I am relieved. Is that a sin?"

"Yes, my son. Sorry to break the news, but it is."

"Can you give me absolution?"

"Ten Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys," the priest said briskly. "The Our Fathers are for lack of charity—a serious sin but not mortal."

"And the Hail Marys?"

"Foul language in the confessional. At some point the adultery issue—yours, not hers—needs to be addressed, but now——"

"You have a lunch date. I understand."

"In truth, I've lost my appetite for lunch, although I should certainly greet my company. The main thing is, I think I'm a little too...too overwhelmed to go into your so-called road comfort just now."

"I understand."

"Good. Now son?"

"Yes?"

"Not to belabor the point, but are you *sure* you didn't give this man permission? Or encourage him in any way? Because then I think we'd be talking mortal sin instead of venial. I'd have to check with my own spiritual advisor to make sure, but——"

"No, Father. But do you think...is it possible that God put that guy in my car?"

In his heart, the priest instantly said *yes*. Aloud he said, "That's blasphemy, good for ten more Our Fathers. I don't know how long you've been outside the doors, but even you should know better. Now do you want to say something else and try for more Hail Marys, or are we done here?"

"We're done, Father."

"Then you're shriven, as we say in the trade. Go your way and sin no more. And take care of your daughter, son. Children only have one mother, no matter how she may have behaved."

"Yes, Father."

Behind the screen, the form shifted. "Can I ask you one more question?"

Monette settled back, reluctantly. He wanted to be gone. "Yes."

"You say the police think they will catch this man."

"They tell me it's only a matter of time."

"My question is, do you *want* the police to catch this man?"

And because what he really wanted was to be gone and say his atonement in the even more private confessional of his car, Monette said, "Of course I do."

On his way back home, he added two extra Hail Marys and two extra Our Fathers.

"We're going to have to make an emergency landing, boss... the reindeer's balls are icing up!"

JIMMY (continued from page 140)

"There was this idea that Jimmy was a Neanderthal and that Sarah was some sort of cutting-edge chick."

to mind a Valentine's Day broadcast of *Jimmy Kimmel Live* a couple of years ago on which Silverman leaned forward in the guest chair she has dimpled so frequently (could any last-minute booking be more readily available?) and blurted, "Jimmy Kimmel, I'm in love with you. You are the love of my life, and I don't care who knows it." To which he gallantly responded, "Let me say in all seriousness—ditto." As hearts melted across the land, she then patted his hand and, a tad overcome, said gently, "I know that's a lot for you." ("That's called tormenting me," he clarified when I reminded him of the exchange.) As would be the wont of the co-creator and co-host of that late, lamented (and/or lamentable) cable juggernaut (and/or Juggy-naut?) *The Man Show,* our fellow Kimmel is not one to gush openly in front of others, which is understandable, unless the subject is food, but still. That is just one of the countless reasons he clearly prizes this recalcitrant minx of a woman three years his junior who knows nothing of tentative expression or fear of public speaking. "I'll be honest with you," she will tell anyone. "The guy is fucking crazy about me."

In this way and so many others, she is his perfect complement, the female extension of his ego and id, unfiltered, with stage training. Like a gamine muse in tomboy's clothing (football jerseys and rugby shirts are her thrill), she validates his enthusiasms, delights in his delights. Indeed, there is little on the essential list of what most delights Kimmel—a key smattering of such being his show, his impeccable work ethic, his colorful family, his former TV partner Adam Carolla ("Adam and I are deeply in love," he stresses to this day), his epic flair for home entertaining, gift giving and Internet surfing, plus his abiding fealty to Huey Lewis, Howard Stern and David Letterman—that has escaped her zesty espousal. "Nobody is ever as excited as I am about things," he confides, "but Sarah comes closest, in the most amazing ways." To that she expansively adds, "I like it best when he's tickled by something or when he tickles himself. Like we have this thing where he teases me about going to the bathroom, specifically about my making doody. I say, horrified, 'I don't do that. Stop it! I didn't do anything!' I say that my bowels have never moved and that my asshole is for decoration—it's a bullet wound. You know, to give me street cred. Stuff like that—my being embarrassed about it—makes him so happy, it brings him so much pleasure that I just keep it going: 'That's disgusting! I don't do that, Jimmy!' He's like, 'Yes, you do!' and he's laughing so hard. I'm actually a little more comfortable with myself than that, but it tickles him so much. It's fun to see him tickled."

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Right there, with that illuminating nodoody anecdote—her fervent belief, by the way, is that there are three foolproof *d*'s in comedy: "doody, diarrhea and, of course, don't forget doody"—she has neatly explained the secret to her man's burgeoning success. I submit there is no better Kimmel, on television or otherwise, than a tickled Kimmel. It is a self-assured Peck's Bad Boy manifestation, sent burbling upward by way of preternatural on-camera ease (possibly nobody in his nocturnal trade approaches his near-Carsonian comfort level—an upside of narcolepsy, perhaps?) and dependably signaled by the release of an infectious mild falsetto cackle (not to be confused with, say, the unsettling pitch of a Leno whinny). It is his single greatest weapon as our youngest wry midnight sentinel of cultural erosion and celebrity despair—to be seen tickled, genuinely so, by stupidity. To wit: Not quite two years into the run of *JKL* (its auspicious network debut, on January 26, 2003, followed Super Bowl XXXVII) there aired in the show's time slot a pair of surprisingly earnest behind-the-scenes documentaries that featured, among other backstage revelations, this sublime insight from (who knew?) guest actress Jennifer Tilly: "There's a trend that infiltrates the talk-show arena where the talk-show hosts are so contemptuous of their shows," she, a veteran of many, states. "Jimmy just seems like he's having a good time." *Good times,* hello! (Or as his executive producer, Jill Leiderman, echoes in an e-mail, "So true. Jimmy loves every show. It is so pure to his heart and core. No room for negativity. And that will never go away. He's wanted it his whole life.") On the same program, the then sophomore host was captured saying, with drop-dead sincerity, "I don't know if there's anyone that appreciates this opportunity as much as I do."

His opening salvo on the very first broadcast bespoke that sentiment most succinctly: "Welcome to *Enjoy It While It Lasts,* my new talk show," he said, as though pinching himself to confirm its veracity. "It's on. This is it. This is the real thing, right here." Early on, viewers hardly flocked—and mostly glimpsed with caution for a good while thereafter—but it was a start, and the network stood by its man throughout. ("Honestly," says Kimmel, gratitude abounding, "those guys could have canceled the show a bunch of times.") Almost five years hence, I ask him if it feels almost five years hence. "It feels longer," he says not unhappily. "My memories of the beginning years of the show seem like my memories of junior high school. The characters were different, but it was crazy and terrifying. Everyone was scared except for me. When everyone is scared, I'm at my happiest. I really love when everyone is terrified." Which only points out another reason he was drawn to La Silverman, who (rather poetically, if you think about it) became his inamorata less than six months before the show's debut. (She: "I wanted to make sure the deal was sealed with ABC first." He: "She's actually tied to the contract.") From the get-go she has played the doting first lady around *JKL*'s Hollywood Boulevard headquarters (a Masonic temple turned swank TV studio, custom-built for Kimmel and located directly across from the Kodak Theatre, home to the Oscars ceremony), wherein her Chihuahua-pug named Duck (seen on her program as her Chihuahua-pug named Doug) wanders the corridors even when she does not. "I love it," she says moonily. "I would say I have a job there. I'm the support system."

It was she, in fact, who on day one originated the ongoing prebroadcast ritual that propels Kimmel from his fourth-floor office down to the stage each night: Any staffer present in the room must chant thrice over "*Best show ever!*" while the host bops fists all around. On those first jangled nights, she chanted solo, but over time legendary *JKL* head writer Steve O'Donnell (of lengthy Letterman camp pedigree) furthered the tradition by tailoring the chants to suit each new episode. "Just for our own amusement and also to genuinely buck up Jimmy," he says. "But it all has Sarah's imprimatur." (A sampling: "We don't have that much enthusiasm for this one. Just kidding! *Best show ever! Best show ever! Best show ever!*" Or: "Not only does show number 906 look the same upside down, it's also the *best show ever*!")

And here, while in the vicinity of the sagacious Professor O'Donnell ("I've always felt kind of like I was the show faculty advisor or some kind of weird attorney assigned to safeguard a spendthrift nephew's inheritance"), I let it fall to him to advance the following unassailable perspective regarding the love story at hand: "You could make a case that the first perceptions of their relationship followed that of the show's early, unfortunate critical path," he says as only he can. "Because when that romance blossomed, there came a fairly snotty haughtiness from some elite circles, as in 'Sarah with Jimmy?' There was this idea that Jimmy was somehow a Neanderthal, as *The Man Show* falsely suggested, and Sarah was some sort of cutting-edge beatnik chick. But of course time has shown exactly how and why they are

harmonious and happy and mutually entertaining to each other. Even though they're both bizarre hyped versions of what you think are gender roles, they complement each other without being identical."

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Date-night discourse, continued.

JK: You seemed way out of my league. I didn't know at the time that you had a fetish for overweight men. I just got lucky.

SS: Stop it!

JK: That's true, by the way.

SS: That's not true!

JK: You have to understand that I honestly—and this is not just humility—never, ever think any woman is interested in me. It has to be beaten over my head.

SS: I think you totally appeal to women. I was definitely attracted to you. You always look cute.

JK: I'm always uncomfortable. But some girl outside the restaurant tonight just said I was cute.

SS: Yeah! When we walked in, I heard her say "He's cute!"

JK: She did mean me, right?

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His love credo has forever been that he could not imagine himself involved with any female who wouldn't have dated him in high school. As he had no particularly serious high school loves, he hazards only this regarding present company: "I think during high school Sarah would've thought I was funny." Her avowal: "I would definitely have loved him in high school. I think we were both unpopular but accepted by all cliques because we were the funny peripheral types." High school for him transpired in Las Vegas (after his family migrated there from Brooklyn, where he had entered life). "I was named Most Likely to Play Poker With Cheerios With His Awkward Friends on a Friday Night," he jokes. Back then, *JKL* saxophonist-bandleader Cleto Escobedo III lived across the street, and together they'd "spend every moment tormenting people with nonsense and cracking up, fucking with our neighbors," says Kimmel. "We were just addicted to laughing." Silverman, meanwhile, was a winsome if clinically depressed high school girl with a chronic bed-wetting problem in Bedford, New Hampshire; her upbringing was, in her words, "you know, liberal Northeastern Jew-y. My sister and I saw our first R-rated movie when I was eight years old." (Says Kimmel, "When you meet her dad you kind of figure it out. He taught the girls to curse when they were little. She'd get a big laugh using dirty words.") Kimmel is a recovering altar boy of seven years' parochial servitude, his blood one-half Italian (mother's side) and one-half German-Irish (father's side). His parents met in a bowling alley and later volunteered as weekend marriage counselors for the church.

At Arizona State University (the Kimmel clan had by then uprooted to Tempe), he met one Gina Maddy, who within two years became his bride, when he was 20. ("I was practically a fetus when I got married.") "He had no wild oats," laments Silverman, who did; she began sowing them upon moving to New York and performing stand-up comedy around town (where, at the age of 22, she all but invisibly joined the cast of *Saturday Night Live* for one unsatisfying season). Famously, she dated only fellow comics. "A comedian not dating a comedian," she has said, "is like a gay guy not dating a gay guy." He, on the other hand, left college early to chase vagabond radio dreams ("I was very headstrong"), winning and losing morning on-air jobs in Phoenix, Seattle, Tampa, Palm Springs (where an adolescent Carson Daly was his intern), Tucson and finally (with some lasting success, as running character Jimmy the Sports Guy) at Los Angeles alt-rock station KROQ-FM—with wife, daughter and son in tow throughout the sojourn. (Katie Kimmel, now 16, and Kevin Kimmel, 14, make him the only late-night host with teenage progeny.) Silverman points out, "He hadn't had any life experiences other than the big ones you're supposed to get to later in life. There were only responsibilities: a wife, kids, getting fired from jobs and having to make things work. He never dated, he never had a girlfriend, he had never lived alone. He's like a throwback in all those classic and positive ways, but there were things he missed out on."

After a while in L.A. he started padding his $50,000 radio salary with TV work—smartass prognosticating for *Fox NFL Sunday*, co-hosting Comedy Central's *Win Ben Stein's Money* and eventually pairing with Adam Carolla to satirize the hapless plight of the modern male for four debauched seasons on *The Man Show*. (Some theme lyrics: "Quit your job and light a fart./Yank your favorite private part./It's *The Man Show*!") "The real reason I was drawn to doing *The Man Show*," he would say and pretty much believe, "is because women hate me." Worse, he had also come to realize that his wife, who had gamely made a few *Man Show* cameos, was most prominently included in that sorry assessment. "I can be very impatient, and I'm a perfectionist, and maybe I am difficult to live with," he says, searching backward even now. "There is truth to that."

Whereupon Hugh M. Hefner—we enjoy this part for obvious reasons—entered his life, and also the life of Sarah K. Silverman, and soon enough nothing would ever be the same for either of them. Less than three weeks after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the New York Friars Club went forth (terrorists be damned) with a long-scheduled roast of Mr. Playboy himself, which Kimmel had agreed to host for its Comedy Central broadcast and for which Silverman had agreed to perform (and during which Gilbert Gottfried would unleash the consummate filthy joke known as "The Aristocrats," which inspired the

"The price goes up as I go down."

eponymous 2005 documentary film that included Silverman's unique on-camera telling of the joke, which brought a lawsuit threat from elderly TV persona Joe Franklin, who she claimed had raped her—*hey, it was a joke!*). It would be Kimmel's debut as a roast master and as a solo host in any significant forum—"I didn't have a lot of hosting experience in general"—and possibly the first time he noticed Silverman in a different light. (Here, at the very least, was proximity if not remotely presumed promise.) "Next," he said upon introducing her, "we have a woman about whom I have nothing unkind to say, in the hope that she'll add me to the very, very long list of comedians she's had sex with—the lovely and extremely slutty Sarah Silverman!" Approaching the podium, she shook his hand, planted a polite kiss on his left cheek, which he returned in kind, and then announced to all present, "Jimmy Kimmel, everyone! He's fat and has no charisma. Watch your back, Danny Aiello!" (To his great glee, she recently bestowed on him the original note card containing those momentous words—it had turned up out of nowhere—which he proudly showed me at his home and said, ever the sentimentalist, "I've got to get this thing framed.") The ardent Friar and fine comic Jeffrey Ross, who helped organize the roast and had privately introduced them backstage, says now, "What a story, these two—a match made on a dais? But really, I don't recall any romantic sparks. Comedy sparks, maybe. I could see in Jimmy's face how much he enjoyed the fact that she had bothered to make jokes about him. Believe me, he was just psyched that a hot chick knew who he was."

In truth, that evening held no tangible magic. "I'd met her before," says Kimmel, "but she didn't remember, and it was just casual." Furthermore, his marriage, though wobbly, was well into its 13th year, except that his heartsick dissatisfaction with it—and his wife's cool indifference to his accomplishments—had incrementally taken its toll and was eating at him as never before. "After 9/11 I decided life was too short," he told me. Early the next year the Kimmels separated but not before he found a house "maybe a thousand feet away" so as to stay close to his children, whom he's permitted to have eight days a month. (Once the divorce was final, however, their mother moved them over the hill into the San Fernando Valley. "She didn't want to make it convenient for me in any way," he says grimly.) Not that any part of the dissolution was easy for him. "Oh my God!" attests Carolla, who lives around the block from Kimmel. "His people don't get divorced." Says Kimmel of his kids, of himself, of that shattered moment in time, "It was just a horrible thing to choose your own happiness over theirs. I feel very selfish to this day. I always will, but I still don't regret it."

•

But wait! How does that chirpy little tune of hers go, the one she sings in her fine perky performance film, *Sarah Silverman: Jesus Is Magic?* "I love you more than bears love honey./I love you more than Jews love money./I love you more than Asians are good at math...." Also, what about his own favorite song of all time, the 1982 Huey Lewis & the News classic "Do You Believe in Love"? ("If there is a song that captures the feeling of a new, unspoiled relationship better," writes Kimmel in the liner notes for the band's most recent greatest-hits compilation, "I haven't heard it.") Do we smell requisite hope astir? For certain, this is the stuff from which we must now leap forward into late summer 2002, amid the multitasking swirl of conceptualizing this new late-night show ABC had decided to give him for the following January. Already he knew that his best boyhood pal, Cleto III, would lead his band (i.e., Cleto and the Cletones, also featuring the gene-spawning aplomb of Cleto's ageless sax-virtuoso father, Cleto Sr.) and that his comic-savant Cousin Sal Iacono would be a havoc-wreaking recurrent ensemble member ("If Buddha were an anarchist, he would be Sal," says O'Donnell, "this very serene guy who just took delight in the upset of others"), as would his effusively befuddled

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Uncle Frank Potenza, the former New York City cop and retired Caesars Palace security guard who would stand faux sentry onstage each night and occasionally be reunited for unscripted filmed pieces with his cantankerous ex-wife, Aunt Chippy (Kimmel's mother's sister, "a very entertaining screaming loudmouth who loves to fight," says her nephew), and their ever bubbly daughter Cousin Micki would come to work in talent relations, and even his own parents, Joan (natural comedic flair) and Jim (Wolf Blitzer look-alike ready for dispatch to confuse major news scenes), would get into the act, and so on. (As Jeffrey Ross now puts it, "Not since Saddam Hussein al-Tikriti has there been this much nepotism in one place.") During this same period the warped new Kimmel-Carolla brainchild for Comedy Central was well into production, a series titled *Crank Yankers,* on which puppets with vaguely familiar voices reenacted actual prank phone calls, providing Kimmel with the perfect opportunity to reach out and enlist Silverman as a puppet voice. (Carolla to Kimmel: "But doesn't she have an annoying voice?" Kimmel to Carolla: "Have you ever heard your own voice?") Thus, via the indomitable laptop that never leaves his side, his cautious cyberspace pursuit of Herself had begun. Happily, results were immediate.

"I was surprised she even returned my e-mails," he says now. "Sometimes we'd exchange 20 e-mails in a night, mostly kind of learning about each other. It was like, Why don't I just pick up a telephone? But I was determined to be very careful, thinking, If she isn't interested, I'm going to act like I'm not either. You dip one toe in and then a couple more. Maybe you get to the ankle." They soon started hanging at her place to watch movies. "I didn't even know if this was going somewhere," she recalls. "We didn't do anything, but we had the same taste in movies." And this continued as such until the ankle and the rest of her could no longer be ignored: "September 8, 2002," she says, "is the date we made official for our first——" Here she demonstrates the repeated insertion of her index finger into an OK sign, if you catch her drift, which I think you do. As goes the now celebrated tale, they were on her couch, watching Woody Allen's *Broadway Danny Rose* (heretofore unheralded for its aphrodisiacal powers), when their faces drew close and stayed close and nothing actually happened. At all. "We were like nose-to-nose for 40 minutes," says she. "It was so awkward. We finally started fooling around, and then I was like, 'Do you want to go into the bedroom?' I walked into my bedroom and over to the bed. I turned around, and he was in the doorway, naked. He was like a naked half-shaved bear with socks on. I was taken aback, like, 'Oh!' And he kind of shrugged and said, 'It's definitely going to happen, right?' It was so cute."

Like so, the second major romantic relationship of his life was fully under way, although not without minor reservations on her part. "Even after we started dating I told him, 'You should date other people. Honestly, for my benefit, just so you can see how awesome I am.' He said, 'I'm not that kind of person.' I still wish he'd had a couple of awful dates." On the other hand, it should be noted, she is possessive enough to also be wary of that wish. Several months ago the gay publication *The Advocate* asked her, hypothetically, what would happen if Kimmel "came out of the closet." She replied, "I'd be devastated. I'd probably have to get a sex change and try to woo him."

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But who could not fall under the expansive Kimmel sway and ever again fathom life outside it? In his madcap office at the show's headquarters, among the countless artifacts on display—an oil portrait of him done by Anna Nicole Smith, a stolen ESPY Award, his MTV *Celebrity Deathmatch* Claymation figure (which more resembles Conan O'Brien and which lost badly in the ring to the clay Carson Daly)—there hangs quite appropriately a huge photograph of Jackie Gleason, comedy's original Bacchus, whose own largesse knew no bounds. As with the Great One (Gleason's fond sobriquet), Kimmel's world overspills plentifully. "Jimmy is one of the most generous guys you'll ever meet, with his money, with his time, with his opinions," says best friend Carolla (whom Silverman calls Kimmel's "soul mate—just think of me as the other woman"). "And in the end, he also has the most. So what does that tell you? The least generous people I know have the least. It's a nice lesson." Ross echoes as much: "He throws it around like Elvis buying pink Cadillacs." More than once even I withstood Kimmel lecturing almost sternly, "I'm very uncomfortable with other people paying for the meal. I'm delighted to pay for any meal." Silverman can only roll her eyes at the unending extravagances. "It's ridiculous," she says. "He's Christmas shopping all year round for every person he's ever met. Last week, out of nowhere, he got me a gift that he ordered from Japan, an earscope. I love cleaning and looking into people's ears. This one has a camera on a long tube, so I can look into my own ear. It's awesome." Another bestowal she cherishes: "Oh my God, a heated toilet seat that shoots water up your butt and vagina! Once you're used to that, you're not comfortable unless you're immaculate up to two inches deep." (All personal Kimmel toilets are similarly outfitted, as that is where he luxuriates best. "I like to read

nine or 10 newspapers while I'm in there," he says proudly.)

To commemorate such impulses, a writer friend commissioned a large stained-glass rendering of a grinning Kimmel draped in papal robes, hoisting a chalice and looming over the etched legend THE PATRON SAINT OF GOOD TIMES. (The piece handsomely adorns his Hermosa Beach getaway, where he vainly tries to unplug on summer weekends.) Most famously, throughout the NFL season he hosts Football Sunday gatherings at his hilltop home (with different games aglow on screens abounding), for which he cooks all day to indulge battalions of friends and family members—"I barely watch the games," he sighs—and serves up mountains of grilled meats and handmade pizzas baked in the enormous outdoor oven he prizes. ("I love this thing," he has enthused. "I want to be buried underneath it when I die.") These weekly fetes are his respite from the grind of making television shows, but he also points out, not at all discontentedly, "Cooking is all about effort for me." This confirms Carolla's essential theory of the inscrutable Kimmel metabolism: "You can take a picture of Jimmy at any given point on any day of the week and not be sure whether he was at work or at play," he ventures. "To see him sitting around with a bunch of like-minded guys watching a plasma screen with pizza in their hands, you couldn't tell if it was another Football Sunday or if they were coming up with comedy bits at his office. To say he never stops working—maybe the real truth is he never stops playing."

At bottom, what Kimmel knows for sure is that the man he has become is the man his inner adolescent always wanted to be. As he will incredulously tell you, "All my high school dreams have been coming true." He has, for instance, sung onstage and gone fly-fishing with Huey Lewis, whose pop catalog provided the idyllic soundtrack for the Kimmel wonder years. ("Everybody makes fun of me," he says, "but I love him.") Also, Howard Stern, whose brisk knack for insurrection mightily inspired Kimmel's early defiant stirrings, has welcomed Kimmel and Silverman on vacation retreats to Anguilla and to his own Hamptons summerhouse. ("I've never met anyone as famous as Howard who is also as polite," Kimmel says most approvingly.) But unquestionably it was during high school that Kimmel's fattest dreams were formed when he discovered David Letterman patrolling the nightscape and reinventing American humor. Letterman came to embody his personal oracle of hope. "I was obsessed," says Kimmel. "The license plate on my first car was L8NITE. For my 18th birthday my mom decorated the cake with the old NBC *Late Night With David Letterman* logo, and I posed for the picture with a big Dave-like cigar in my mouth." Because he read in Letterman's first *Playboy Interview* that he had started out in radio, young Jimmy decided that too would be his path. And when, miraculously enough, he found himself booked in 1999 to promote *The Man Show* on Letterman's CBS *Late Show,* he was actually thrilled to be bumped. "Roseanne went long," he says. "I was so relieved. I had stuff for him that I'd prepared since I was 18 years old."

When he returned weeks later and landed in the chair beside the Big Man's desk, he simply blurted, "I idolize you. I really do. It's absolutely true. I love you, I would say...I really, really love you." Said Letterman, "I appreciate that." Then, after Kimmel unbuttoned his shirt to reveal a giant fake tattoo of Letterman's head on his chest and displayed the aforementioned 18th-birthday-cake photo, Letterman patiently asked, "Was there ever a period in your life when you came by the house really late at night?" His second appearance occurred on the night when a Stupid Pet Trick went awry and a dog bit Letterman's face. Kimmel solicitously brought out tissues to wipe away the blood and said, "I will not rest until that animal is destroyed!" But on that occasion, as well as on his four subsequent visits prior to the birth of the competing *JKL,* his hero unfailingly concluded each introduction with the seismic benediction "The very funny Jimmy Kimmel!" Kimmel says, "If it had ever seemed that he didn't like me, I would have been absolutely devastated. Without knowing him at all, I feel as if I know him well and know what he likes."

And so it is that, always within reach in his Hollywood office, our eager acolyte keeps a framed letter Letterman sent him five years ago, declining the invitation to appear as the first guest on the inaugural *Jimmy Kimmel Live* broadcast. It came in response to the cheerfully brief note Kimmel had written to him on—don't ask—Lionel Richie's personal stationery: "Dear Dave: Please be my first guest. Thanks in advance, Jimmy. PS: Let's not be childish about this." Letterman's return volley: "Dear Jimmy: Thanks for asking me to be the first guest on your show. Unfortunately, I'll be out of the country on business. I'm sure the program will be a success regardless. Sincerely, Dave." Kimmel chuckled upon rereading it to me and said, "*On business!* It's so perfect. He didn't even have to take a big swing, his character is so well defined." The younger host's sense of fraternal observance is that finely tuned. As the former Letterman head writer who has served Kimmel in the same capacity from the outset, O'Donnell offers this privileged take on the kinship at hand: "You can talk about Dave's gift for pessimism and Jimmy's gift for optimism, but there is a happy skepticism where they both meet in the middle. They both are sort of amused and outside of most mores—showbiz, social, political or whatever. And they are both exceptionally brighter than people would ever guess from watching them." Then there comes this story from Kimmel's executive producer, Jill Leiderman, a beloved *Late Show* employee of nine years who sought Letterman's advice before seizing the bosslady reins at *JKL* last year. Her ex-leader thoughtfully imparted the best wisdom he could muster: "Protect Jimmy at all costs and make sure he knows you have

"Remember that social networking website I joined? ...It's called My Bed."

his interests in mind with every decision you make." When I reminded Kimmel of that heartfelt directive, he shook his head with amazement, a starstruck teen all over again. "It's so crazy for me. His even saying my name is just so weird."

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But in the end, and at long last, he has found the high school dream girl previously beyond his comprehension, now all grown up and ready to play at his whim and also at her own. For instance, on his show she once presented him with a special Love Coupon promising this fanciful favor: "Good for one romantic night where I dress up like Huey Lewis!" (You could almost see him conjuring the image, not without palpable intrigue.) From her, he says, "I just learned to behave like a human being. People wrongly assume she's a bitch and sassy and impossible, and she's not any of those things. She's unbelievably nice to her friends, genuinely happy for people and extraordinarily supportive of me. And I promise you, that is totally alien to me. It's a first and so important, especially when your ego can be so fragile. You work on something for a long time, and then if your partner is not interested, it is the worst. If she doesn't care, who does? No one must care."

And so each night in bed he will kiss her hand while she sleeps or tickle her back to help her drift off or inquire about her bowels, which she has never moved in her life. Except that he has come to know otherwise. "She swears to me on her mother's life that she's never taken a shit," he says merrily. "But then I happened to find a small half-empty container of Fleet suppositories in her bathroom drawer that seemed to contradict that claim. Rather than confront her with them, I wrote a little note and stuffed it in the jar. The note said only this: 'I know what you are doing!' Months went by before she saw it, but she absolutely saw it, and it was a thrilling moment, believe me. I've always liked jokes that take a long time to pay off. Mostly, though, I just wanted her to know that, like Santa Claus, I am always watching."

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

(continued from page 144)

that won 33 games last year. Leading the way are guards Mario Chalmers and Russell Robinson. Bill Self, one of the game's elite coaches, inspires great defensive play. **Achilles' heel:** Guard Brandon Rush, easily the roster's premier talent, will be a surefire all-American—if he can stay healthy. Rush could have been in the NBA now, but he withdrew from the draft after tearing his ACL in a May pickup game. He's not expected to play until December.

5. Indiana Since coach Bobby Knight was fired in 2000, this program has seen its ups and downs, but after the tumultuous tenure of former Knight assistant Mike Davis, Kelvin Sampson has the Hoosiers poised for greatness. Senior forward D.J. White opted to stay in school after flirting with the NBA draft. Sophomore Armon Bassett should start at point guard after a solid freshman season. **Emerging star:** High school all-American Eric Gordon will start at shooting guard from day one; he should be an immediate superstar. **Don't miss:** The Hoosiers travel to East Lansing, Michigan on March 2 to take on Michigan State. The Big Ten title will likely be on the line.

6. Georgetown The Hoyas have recaptured the status they enjoyed with the legendary teams John Thompson coached in the 1980s. It took another Thompson to accomplish that: John Thompson III enters his fourth season fresh off an appearance in the Final Four. He has lost forward Jeff Green, but seven-foot-two Roy Hibbert, the best low-post center in the college game, stayed in school. The Hoyas return three other starters, including the tremendous backcourt of Jessie Sapp and Jonathan Wallace. **Key stat:** Thanks to Hibbert, Georgetown averaged 5.1 blocked shots a game last year and topped the Big East Conference in scoring defense and rebounding.

7. Tennessee Since coach Bruce Pearl arrived in Knoxville two seasons ago, the Vols have become a fixture in the national rankings. Four starters return this season, including SEC Player of the Year Chris Lofton (20.8 points a game last season), senior JaJuan Smith and sophomore Ramar Smith, all in Pearl's three-guard attack. Wayne Chism is the lone returning starter in the frontcourt. **Achilles' heel:** This club is vertically challenged. Scrappy play in the paint is a must. **Key stat:** Tennessee went an eye-popping 16–0 at home last season but was just 8–11 outside Thompson-Boling Arena.

8. Louisville Coach Rick Pitino has rebuilt this team to his taste, with healthy portions of speed and athleticism. Four starters are back,

(continued on page 203)

PLAYMATE NEWS

BUBBLE HEADS

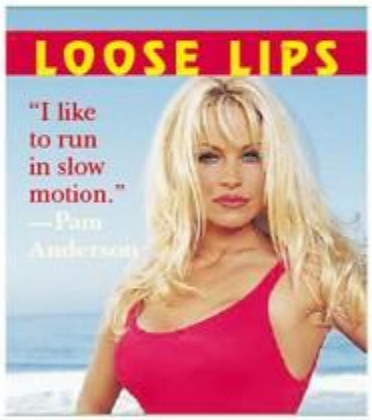
Playmate Jayde Nicole gathered the girls for a car wash.

The line of cars outside the Holiday Inn Express in Whitby, Ontario stretched for blocks, but they weren't there for the free continental breakfast. No, they had come for Playmate Jayde Nicole's charity bikini car wash. Miss January (above, in red-and-white bikini) rounded up 30 girls, among them Special Editions model Amy Lynn Grover (above, center left), to soap up anything on wheels. "There were guys coming through on bicycles," Jayde says, laughing, "and we even washed people who chose to walk through. One guy paid $100." The $3,500 in proceeds was donated to the (RED) campaign, created by Bono and Bobby Shriver, to assist women and children affected by HIV/AIDS in Africa. "The (RED) campaign is getting so much attention, but many people still don't know about it," says the brunette beauty, who also promotes the cause by selling (RED) bracelets through her MySpace page. Whether online or on the street, Jayde clearly has a knack for stopping traffic. The car wash, which counts Extreme Fitness and Hooters among its sponsors, was so successful that Jayde is already planning her next event. "I'm thinking of another car wash or maybe a golf tournament." Whether by sports car or golf cart, we're there.

10 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

When PLAYBOY scout David Mecey spotted Karen McDougal in a Venus Swimwear contest in Florida, he promptly introduced her to our photo editors. Shortly after, Karen was named Miss December and then PMOY 1998. Readers voted her the second most memorable Playmate of the 1990s, just after some gal named Pam.

LOOSE LIPS



"I like to run in slow motion."
—Pam Anderson

RED-HOT CARPET

From far left: Sara Jean Underwood at the AFI Life Achievement Award event at the Kodak Theatre in Hollywood; Tiffany Fallon at the Academy of Country Music Awards in Las Vegas; Stacy Sanches at an album-release party at Ritual in Hollywood; Kelly Monaco at the ESPYs Extreme event at the Roosevelt Hotel in Hollywood; Shauna Sand at the ShaDang fashion show at Boulevard 3 in L.A.

HOT SHOT

MY FAVORITE PLAYMATE

By Eli Roth

—director

Marianne Gravatte is a combination of Christie Brinkley and Heather Thomas rolled into one—but fully naked. I love that early-1980s curvy California-blonde look. Growing up outside Boston we didn't see girls like that. I was so happy for her when she won PMOY 1983; it felt like a victory for both of us.

POP QUESTIONS: JENNIFER LAVOIE

Q: We hear you recently started a business selling fabric plant hangers. How did that come about?

A: A friend of mine had been bugging me for a year about a new kind of plant hanger she'd filed a patent for. I looked at the design and said, "Well, let me take it home and fix it up." I changed it a little, and we launched our company with a website, primitive planters.com. Our first order was for 6,000 units.

Q: How do you market your product?

A: We first attended one small trade show that targeted gift shops, but we realized that wasn't our niche. We figured we wanted to get in with the big retailers, so we attended one of the largest garden shows in the country, in Florida. Our booth was hopping. Then word got out that I was a Centerfold, and more people visited. I didn't sit down the whole weekend. That one trade show launched us overnight.

Q: Where do you see the business going?

A: My goal is to get $1 million in purchase orders for spring 2008. A Canadian company wants to sign us to an exclusive contract for all of Canada. That would be great.

BIKER BABES

The Sturgis Motorcycle Rally is among the oldest, largest and most infamous in the world. Every year 500,000 bikers descend on the sleepy town in the Black Hills of South Dakota to partake in two-wheeled debauchery. From far left: Playmates Jordan Monroe, Patrice Hollis and Sara Jean Underwood indulged in the hogs and hoopla.

PLAYMATE GOSSIP

Miss June 2003 **Tailor James** appears in an ad for Hydra Vodka Water. How refreshing.... Miss April 2001 **Katie Lohmann** plays a bounty hunter on *Reno 911!* and appears in a six-page layout in *Iron Man* magazine, as well as in an upcoming Dillon Aero calendar.... Miss February 1986 **Julie McCullough** recently wrapped a week of stand-up at the Improv at Harrah's in Las Vegas.... Miss October 2001 **Stephanie Heinrich** and Miss October 2004 **Kimberly Holland** teamed with Jameson Whiskey and America's Sexiest Bartender Stefaney Lewis for a party at Azza in New York City.... Miss October 2005 **Amanda Paige** landed the cover of *Guitar World*.... What's in the case? Look for Miss May 2006 **Alison Waite** to join Miss August 2004 **Pilar Lastra** on the current season of *Deal or No Deal*.... Miss March 2004 **Sandra Hubby** and **Stephanie Heinrich** helped celebrate the publication of *The Coup*, a novel by Managing Editor Jamie Malanowski (pictured below), at Elaine's in New York City.... Playmate of the Year **Sara Jean Underwood** appeared on TheStreet.com's TV program *RealMoney* to discuss investing with host Kristin Bentz. Sara also hosted the show *Now on Ripe* on Ripe TV On Demand.... Miss January 2001 **Irina Voronina** appears in a series of viral videos for DeclareYourself.com.... Miss December 1992 **Barbara Moore** is a new mother to a baby girl named Priscilla. Congrats!

Citrus rodeo champ Tailor James.

Playmates take in New York's lit scene.

MORE PLAYMATES

See your favorite Playmate's pictorial in the Cyber Club at cyber.playboy.com or download her to your phone at playboymobile.com.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

(continued from page 200)

including the entire frontcourt of David Padgett, Terrence Williams and Juan Palacios. Pitino also added one of the nation's top recruiting classes. Sophomore Edgar Sosa will emerge as a major contributor at point guard. **X factor:** Power forward Derrick Caracter underwent knee surgery in the summer. If that knee's healthy, he'll be a huge scorer off the bench. **Key stat:** Sure, Pitino is defensive-minded, but the team needs more scoring. The Cardinals averaged only 71.6 points a game last season, ranking 117th in the nation.

9. Michigan State Here's a recipe for success: Start with coach Tom Izzo, who has four Final Four trips and a national title on his résumé, then bring back last season's top five scorers and two top rebounders. If age and experience are the keys to winning, Izzo's squad looks potent. The best player is senior guard Drew Neitzel, our preseason pick to win Big Ten Player of the Year honors. **X factor:** The club's schedule is brutal, with a home game against North Carolina State in the Big Ten–ACC Challenge, neutral-site contests with 2007 NCAA tournament teams BYU and Texas, and a spot in the CBE Classic, which will feature Maryland, Missouri and UCLA. **Key stat:** Last season the Spartans lost only one game at home. They went 1–8 on the road.

10. Texas A&M New coach Mark Turgeon arrives from Wichita State. He inherits three returning starters and 10 lettermen. (Alas, the departed are all-American guard Acie Law IV and team leader Antanas Kavaliauskas. Ouch.) Power forward Joseph Jones leads up front, while backcourt sharpshooter Josh Carter stands to break the school record for three-pointers in a season (86), which he set a year ago. **Emerging star:** The solid freshman class is led by center DeAndre Jordan, one of the most highly touted prospects ever at A&M. He can do it all. **X factor:** The Aggies have a rough schedule, with home games against LSU, Alabama and Kansas and away at Arizona and Texas.

11. Arizona The Wildcats lost 55 percent of their scoring from a year ago. But with the return of senior guard Jawann McClellan and three other senior leaders, we are touting them to make another NCAA tourney run. Last year's Pac 10 Freshman of the Year Chase Budinger puts points on the board (15.6 a game in 2006–2007), and standout recruit Jerryd Bayless should make an immediate impact. **Don't miss:** Either of Arizona's games against Pac 10 rival and PLAYBOY pick for national champion UCLA, in Los Angeles on February 2 and Tucson on March 2.

12. Duke Several questions need to be answered if the Blue Devils are to return to their customary perch in the top five. Will DeMarcus Nelson pick up the scoring and rebounding load left behind by forward Josh McRoberts, who jumped to the NBA? Will sophomore wing Jon Scheyer, who averaged more than 30 points a game as a high school senior, become the human highlight reel scouts said he would be? But the biggest question is, Can this team stay healthy? **Achilles' heel:** Over the summer, Nelson broke his wrist, backup forward David McClure had knee surgery and seven-foot-one center Brian Zoubek busted his foot. **Key stat:** Point guard Greg Paulus averaged more than three turnovers a game last season, compared with only 3.8 assists. Yikes.

13. Marquette The seven top scorers from a 24–10 Golden Eagles team are returning, and the three-guard rotation—juniors Dominic James, Jerel McNeal and Wesley Matthews—is fabulously talented. Inside, center Ousmane Barro and forwards Dan Fitzgerald and Lazar Hayward should control the boards. Tom Crean is one of the best young coaches in the game. **X factor:** At center, Barro is a fine defender, but he must score more than the 8.1 points a game he averaged last season. **Key stat:** McNeal's 2.6 steals and 4.8 rebounds a game in 2006–2007 earned him Big East Defensive Player of the Year honors.

14. Washington State It's hard to believe that a year ago this team was picked to finish last in the Pac 10. Instead, Washington State finished second behind UCLA. Four starters and 10 lettermen return for coach Tony Bennett, now in his second season after replacing his father, Dick, a legend on the Cougars bench. All-Conference Kyle Weaver and Derrick Low form a tight backcourt. Low, a long-distance threat, was the team's top scorer last season (13.7 points a game). He opens things up inside for WSU's front line, namely center Robbie

"After this I have several stockings I need stuffed, too."

Cowgill. **Don't miss:** UCLA comes to town on February 7 for a Pac 10 showdown.

15. Oregon The Ducks return with a boatload of talent, including four starters who are all major contributors. Seniors Malik Hairston and Bryce Taylor are the backbone of this club; both swingmen have scored more than 1,000 career points. Senior forward Maarty Leunen is a horse on the boards. Add point guard Tajuan Porter, who led the Pac 10 in three-pointers last season with 110, and you have the firepower needed to make a deep run in March. **Key stat:** Coach Ernie Kent is 20 victories shy of becoming Oregon's all-time winningest coach. His players will try to put him over the top this season. **Don't miss:** Either of Oregon's battles with UCLA, at home on January 24 and away on February 23.

16. Stanford En route to a spot in last season's tournament, Stanford beat Oregon, UCLA and USC—all eventual Sweet 16 teams. Almost everyone from that squad is back; the club lost one letterman. Twin brothers Brook and Robin Lopez combined to block more shots (118) than seven *teams* in the Pac 10 last season, and they can score, too. Coach Trent Johnson has experienced upperclassmen to work with: senior Fred Washington and juniors Mitch Johnson, all–Pac 10 performer Lawrence Hill and Anthony Goods. **Achilles' heel:** The team ranked last in the conference in turnover margin last season. **X factor:** The schedule is unrelenting: two games against UCLA, two against Arizona, two against Oregon, two against USC and two against Washington State. The Pac 10 is a shark tank.

17. Gonzaga Every time a coaching job opens at an elite school, Mark Few's name is mentioned. But Few has pledged his love to Gonzaga. A berth in the big dance this year would be the Bulldogs' 10th straight, and fans have Few to thank for the team's consistency. Junior Jeremy Pargo will lead the attack at point guard, but he and shooting guard Matt Bouldin will have their work cut out for them, compensating for the departed Derek Raivio, the team's leading scorer. **X factor:** Character issues loom over junior forward Josh Heytvelt, the team's top returning scorer, after a run-in with the law in February.

18. USC Coach Tim Floyd is trying to bring stability to a club that struggled prior to his arrival in Los Angeles in 2005. Returning is standout freshman Taj Gibson, who averaged 12.2 points a game in 2006–2007 and was the Pac 10's third leading rebounder. Sophomore guard Daniel Hackett also emerged as a team leader last year. Both Trojans, however, may be eclipsed by the new man on campus. **Emerging star:** Floyd landed one of the top high school all-Americans in guard O.J. Mayo, who averaged 28.2 points a game at Huntington High School in West Virginia. **Don't miss:** The Trojans face a huge test when they play Memphis on December 4 at Madison Square Garden in the Jimmy V Classic.

19. North Carolina State Speaking of Jimmy V, a quarter century has passed since Valvano's Wolfpack beat Houston at the buzzer in the greatest upset in NCAA tourney finals history. Second-year coach Sidney Lowe is in search of that magic. With four returning starters, he has the core of a team that began to jell down the stretch last season. Brandon Costner (16.8 points a game) is a solid scorer and the Wolfpack's leading rebounder. Add forwards Gavin Grant and Ben McCauley, and you have a veteran front line to handle the battles of the ACC. **X factor:** This team lacks a dominant point guard. **Don't miss:** The North Carolina Tar Heels invade Raleigh on February 20. A classic rivalry.

20. Kentucky Longtime coach Tubby Smith left for Minnesota; now one of the most pressure-packed jobs in the world goes to Billy Gillispie, who comes to Lexington after a successful run at Texas A&M. The roster features only three upperclassmen. Freshman forward Patrick Patterson is a bright spot. Look for him to contribute on both ends of the floor. **X factor:** Junior center Jared Carter played three games before suffering a season-ending shoulder injury in 2006; he reinjured the shoulder in a pickup game in June. After surgery his full return is a question mark. **Key stat:** Senior guard Ramel Bradley hit 81.5 percent from the line last season.

21. Texas Yes, the Longhorns lost last season's NCAA Player of the Year, swingman Kevin Durant. But coach Rick Barnes has 10 lettermen and four starters back from an NCAA tournament team. The best of the bunch is point guard D.J. Augustin, who dished out more than 200 assists in 2006–2007. He will team with A.J. Abrams to form a standout backcourt that should keep UT in the national rankings. Up front the Longhorns will look to Damion James for scoring and rebounding, while a solid recruiting class should help offset Durant's loss. **Don't miss:** A key early-season matchup against Michigan State in Auburn Hills, Michigan on December 22.

22. Davidson Last season was a magical one on the Davidson campus as coach Bob McKillop's team won 29 games and advanced to the NCAA tournament, a rare thrill for this little North Carolina college. The top four scorers return. Guard Stephen Curry leads the offensive (he scored 21.5 points a game last season). His running mate, senior Jason Richards, provides experience and a threat from the perimeter. The frontcourt is deep and talented. **X factor:** Can this mid-major team handle the spotlight? Expectations are suddenly high. **Don't miss:** Early-season tests against North Carolina on November 14 and Duke on December 1 could open America's eyes to how good this club is.

23. Alabama Brandon Hollinger and Mikhail Torrance return to the backcourt ready to kick it up a notch. Power forward Richard Hendrix (14.6 points a game) leads the front line; he's one of the SEC's top talents. Coach Mark Gottfried is missing only two starters from last year's squad, so the Tide should come on strong. **Achilles' heel:** Gottfried's lineup lacks height. The tallest of the bunch are sophomore center Yamene Coleman and freshman Justin Knox, a pair of six-foot-niners. **X factor:** The club lost its best player, guard Ronald Steele, to injury in the off-season. That puts a lot of pressure on the young recruits to step up on day one.

24. Arkansas Coach Stan Heath was canned in March. John Pelphrey comes in from South Alabama, and he finds all five starters back from a 21-win team. The Hogs' up-tempo attack features some athletic scorers: forward Charles Thomas, swingman Sonny Weems and seven-foot center Steven Hill, third on UA's all-time blocked-shot list. **Emerging star:** Shooting guard Patrick Beverley was SEC Newcomer of the Year last season. As a sophomore, he should become a primetime threat. **Don't miss:** The Hogs journey to Thompson-Boling Arena to battle conference rival Tennessee on February 13.

25. Southern Illinois Several schools coveted coach Chris Lowery last spring, but he chose to stay at SIU. He knows this crew has a shot at another Missouri Valley Conference title and a deep run in March. The team's success results from the staff's ability to recruit excellent players the major programs pass over, like forwards Matt Shaw and Randal Falker, the team's leading returning scorer (12.3 points a game) and rebounder (7.7). Point guard Bryan Mullins runs the court as if he owns the place. All three started on last season's Sweet 16 squad. **Key stat:** The Salukis were 9–1 last year when Shaw scored 15 points or more. **Don't miss:** SIU faces an early-season test on December 1 when powerhouse Indiana comes to Carbondale for one of the biggest home games in Southern Illinois's history.

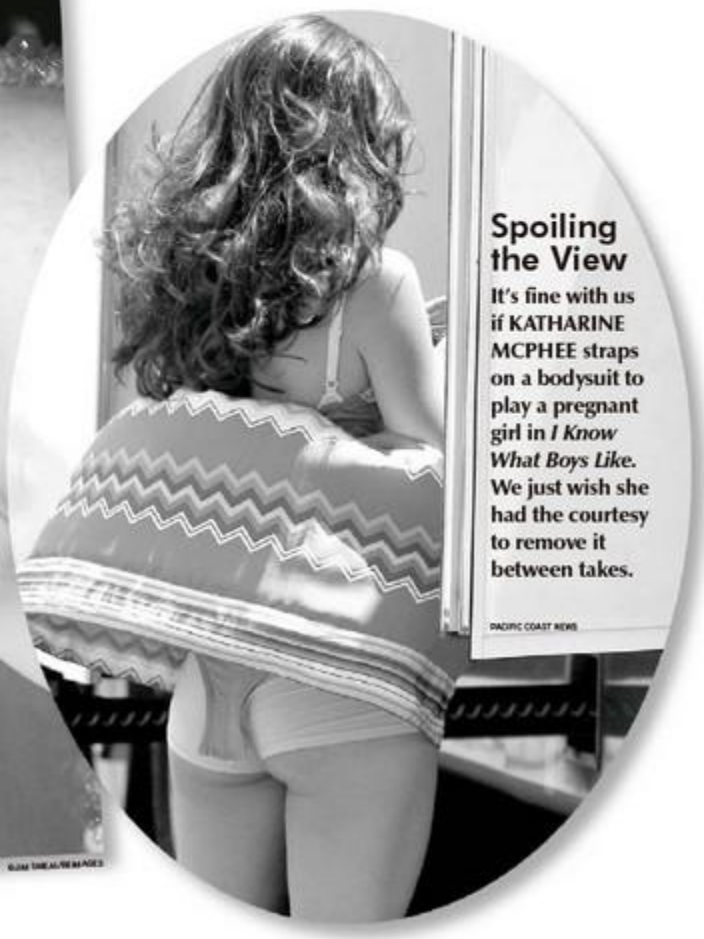
Grapevine

Where's the Outrage?

Michael Clarke Duncan, Mickey Rourke and CARLA GUGINO played characters who die in *Sin City*. Rumor has it Duncan and Rourke will return for *Sin City 2* (the stories aren't told in order), but Gugino, whose sweet, naked lesbian parole officer never hurt anyone, will not.

Free at Last

Fitness babe TYLER STEVENS always wanted to be in PLAYBOY, but sponsors wouldn't have it. Today her dream comes true. It's not exactly the Make-A-Wish Foundation, but we do what we can.



Spoiling the View

It's fine with us if KATHARINE MCPHEE straps on a bodysuit to play a pregnant girl in *I Know What Boys Like*. We just wish she had the courtesy to remove it between takes.

Brava, Brava

The celebrity wardrobe malfunction is often more art than error. These ladies know what they're doing. A well-slipped nip—like this twin peek by U.K. *Big Brother* evictee CHARLEY UCHEA—merits applause.

LEE ALAN BROWN/ESCOPT/GETTY IMAGES (2)

JEFF VESPA/FILMMAGIC FOR HARDTY MAGAZINE

It's Okay. She Wants You to Look

DENNIS HOPPER: What a lovely gown. ELLEN BARKIN: Buzz off, perv. HOPPER: What is that, Dior? BARKIN: As if you can tell. HOPPER: Nice tits. BARKIN: Ain't they?

BRIAN RICHMOND/TAKE2PHOTOGRAPHY.CO.UK

MCCOOPHOTOGRAPHY.COM/BRIAN RICHMOND

The Miracle of Childbearing

When a man and a woman love each other very much, they share a special hug and soon she has jumped two cup sizes. Flaunt 'em while you got 'em, NICOLE RICHIE.

42nd Place Never Looked So Good

How Miss Fife JENNA SEYMOUR didn't win the 2007 Miss Great Britain contest is beyond us. What, was there no topless-vinyl-corset-and-fuck-me-platforms category?

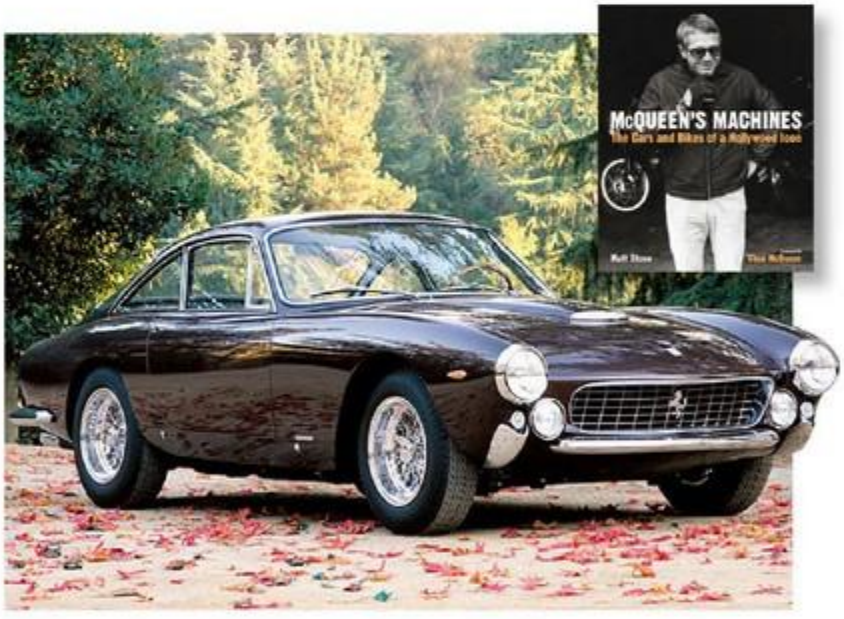
Potpourri

PUTT HER THERE

Strip mini golf is one of life's great pleasures, but for reasons we can't fathom it's still frowned on at our local putt-putt course. Rather than sneaking in at midnight to get in a few holes, pick up My Mini Golf ($420, unicahome.com). The kit lets you lay out a custom set of microlinks in and around your home, with nine holes and up to 13 handicaps, including loops, bridges, twists and more. We won't reveal our fiendish personal blueprint here, but suffice it to say the Grotto makes one hell of a water hazard.

TRACK TIME

When you're slogging through a workout with an iPod strapped to your arm, the last thing you want to do is reach across your body to fiddle with it. The wireless iControl from Timex ($125, timex.com) allows you to simply touch your wrist to track forward and back or adjust the volume. Setup is simple: Just plug the receiver into the iPod's charging port and it syncs right up. Now get moving!

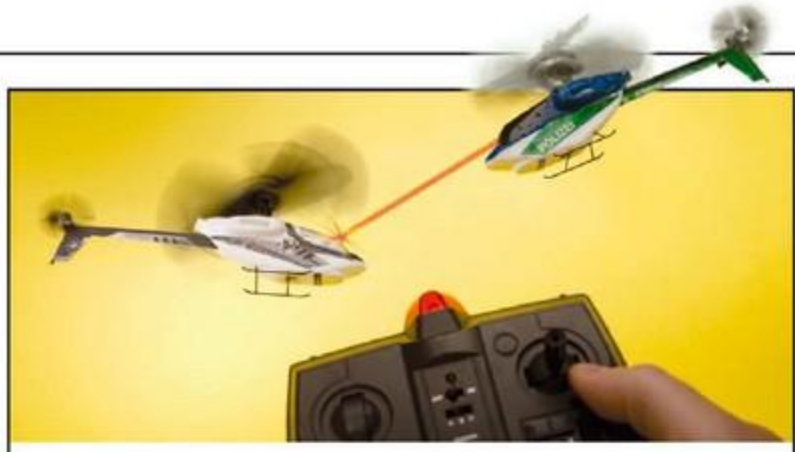


HEART LIKE A WHEEL

Hollywood's adoration of speed peaked in the 1960s, and at the top was Steve McQueen, the king of cool. You remember the Ford Mustang GT fastback he drove in *Bullitt* (1968), his Triumph motorcycle in *The Great Escape* (1963) and his Gulf-Porsche racing car from *Le Mans* (1971). Now comes a coffee-table book by Matt Stone, *McQueen's Machines: The Cars and Bikes of a Hollywood Icon,* which details those historic rides. It also takes you inside McQueen's garage for a look at his beloved Jag XK-SS roadster and the 1963 Ferrari 250 GT Berlinetta Lusso (pictured) that sold at auction this past summer for just over $2.3 million. Think of this book as a love story. It was good to be king.

ONCE UPON A TIME IN MEXICO

"Hidden within this painting," says motorsport artist Eric Herrmann, "are desert animals, plants, winning racers and the names of celebrities who have tackled the most challenging of off-road events." Herrmann's work aims to capture on canvas the essence of this past November's 40th anniversary of the Baja 1000 off-road rally. The original painting is up for grabs (48 by 40 inches, $40,000; ericherrmannstudios.com), but you can get a limited-edition print for $150.



DEATH FROM THE SKIES

The Sky Challenger PicoZ Battle Pack ($80, firebox.com) has two easy-to-use RC copters, each with an infrared laser for aerial tag. Use your craft's laser to paint your pal's bird and his motor will cut out. Fast reactions can save him from eating pavement, and the light copters aren't easily damaged by crashing. Bonus points for reciting dialogue from *Airwolf* as you play.

A FRENCH TOAST

The bottle struck us first. You can't look at it without thinking of a deeply suntanned couple having sex on a beach in France. (At least we can't.) Then we tasted: apricot marmalade, walnut, lemon zest, a hint of chocolate. Martell, the oldest of the major cognac producers (founded in 1715), has launched its latest bottling, Creation Grand Extra ($300, in fine liquor stores). For a perfect nightcap, pair it with a La Aurora 100 Años cigar.

WATCH IT, YOU

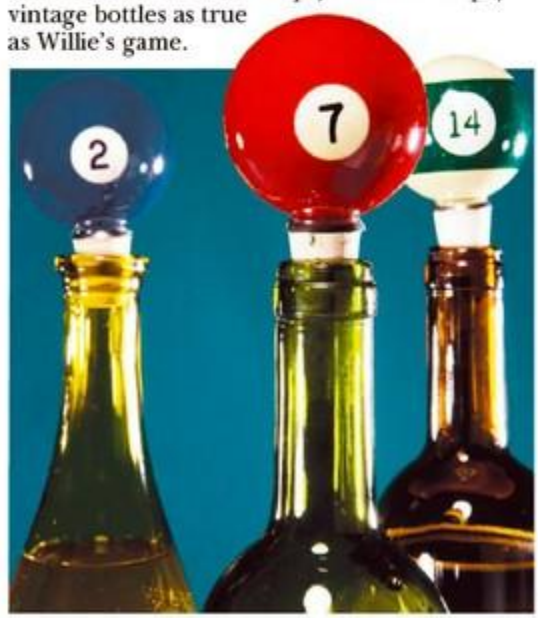
The TiVo box is a revolutionary device, but storage space has always been its weakness, especially for high-definition content, which uses 10 times the memory of standard def. That's where weaKnees comes in. The company buys new TiVos, cracks them open, installs mammoth hard drives, then rewarrants and sells them. It offers boxes with up to 144 hours of high-def capacity ($300 to $1,400, weaknees.com).

HOLD EVERYTHING

With all the digital flotsam in your life, it makes less sense than ever to keep your movies, photos and music on specific computers. Iomega's StorCenter ($390, iomega.com) is a network-attached hard drive that works like a digital butler. Hook it up to your Wi-Fi router and it can feed files to any computer in range. Beyond being a repository for things you want easy access to, it can also back up your computers, and its terabyte of storage comes in two separate drives so it can even back up itself.

BALLS OUT

Billiards master Willie Mosconi knew how to work the felt. He could run table after table and pull off elaborate trick shots. But all his talent could not keep a bottle of wine from turning. Mr. Pocket Billiards would have enjoyed these authentic vintage-billiard-ball wine stoppers ($32, sterlingplace.com). They're mounted on cork to keep your half-empty vintage bottles as true as Willie's game.



WHERE AND HOW TO BUY ON PAGE 176.

Next Month

THE YEAR IN REVIEW.

KINGS OF THE ROAD.

BLUE LIGHT SPECIAL.

CURRY VINDALOO.

ADRIANNE CURRY—SINCE AMERICA'S TOP MODEL WED CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT, WE HAVE A NEW FAVORITE BRADY. COME SEE WHY IN AN UNBRIDLED PICTORIAL, AND KEEP YOUR EYES WIDE SHUT. THANKS FOR SHARING, PETE.

BLUE LIGHT—PERHAPS THE LUSTIEST OF AMERICA'S LITERARY LIONS RETURNS TO OUR PAGES WITH A STORY ABOUT A MAN WHO ASSESSES HIS FAMILIAL BONDS AFTER UNDERGOING A SYMBOLIC MEDICAL TREATMENT. FICTION BY **JOHN UPDIKE**

TINA FEY—IN THE INTERVIEW, **ERIC SPITZNAGEL** TALKS TO *30 ROCK*'S LEADING LADY ABOUT HER SERIES, HER UPCOMING MOVIE, *BABY MAMA,* AND HER NERDY SEX APPEAL.

THE APPETITES OF ARTIE LANGE—**MIKE GUY** CONSIDERS THE MESSY LIFE OF HOWARD STERN'S RIGHT-HAND MAN. WELL LOVED BUT HAUNTED BY HIS TASTE FOR COKE, HEROIN AND BOOZE, LANGE RISKS FOLLOWING IN THE LAMENTED FOOTSTEPS OF BELUSHI AND FARLEY.

PARTY OF THE YEAR—PARIS HILTON, LINDSAY LOHAN, MICHAEL VICK, DON IMUS, SCOOTER LIBBY AND OTHER BOLDFACED NAMES—SANJAYA, ANYONE?—MEET IN ONE MEMORABLE SHEBANG.

CARS OF THE YEAR—*PLAYBOY*'S DEDICATED GEARHEADS PICK THE TOP RIDES IN EVERY CATEGORY, FROM THE POSH NEW MASERATI TO THE RENASCENT MERCEDES DIESEL, WHICH PACKS MORE *VROOM* THAN *GLUG*.

DEATH OF AN INTERPRETER—REPORTER **CHRISTIAN PARENTI** RETURNS TO AFGHANISTAN, WHERE SHIFTING POLITICS AND BUNGLING OFFICIALS STILL CAUSE SENSELESS DEATH.

PRIORAT—NOVELIST **ROBERT COOVER** SINGS THE PRAISES OF A LITTLE-KNOWN WINE REGION IN SOUTHERN SPAIN THAT IS FAST BECOMING THE TALK OF OENOPHILES EVERYWHERE.

HELENA BONHAM CARTER—THE STAR OF *SWEENEY TODD* AND TIM BURTON'S SULTRY MUSE TELLS US THAT LOVE IS IN FACT STRANGE. *20Q* BY **JASON BUHRMESTER**

THE YEAR IN SEX—BRITNEY DID WHAT? LARRY CRAIG WAS WHERE? *PLAYBOY* RECALLS THE ONLY MOMENTS THAT MATTERED IN 2007.

PLAYMATE REVIEW—FEELING WISTFUL? REVISIT THE 12 MOST CAPTIVATING WOMEN IN RECENT MEMORY.

THE FOUR S'S—THE PLAYBOY MAN TAKES HIS GROOMING ROUTINE A STEP FURTHER BEFORE VENTURING INTO THE FIELD.

PLUS: JONATHAN RABAN PONDERS THE CLASS-FUELED CLASH BETWEEN WEEKENDERS AND LOCALS, AND PLAYMATE **SANDRA NILSSON** KICKS THE YEAR OFF RIGHT.

Playboy (ISSN 0032-1478), December 2007, volume 54, number 12. Published monthly by Playboy in national and regional editions, Playboy, 680 North Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, Illinois 60611. Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, Illinois and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Canadian Publications Mail Sales Product Agreement No. 40035534. Subscriptions: in the U.S., $29.97 for 12 issues. Postmaster: Send address change to Playboy, P.O. Box 2007, Harlan, Iowa 51537-4007. For subscription-related questions, call 800-999-4438, or e-mail circ@ny.playboy.com.